The Economist

Present at the creation

A survey of America's world role | June 29th 2002

Present at the creation

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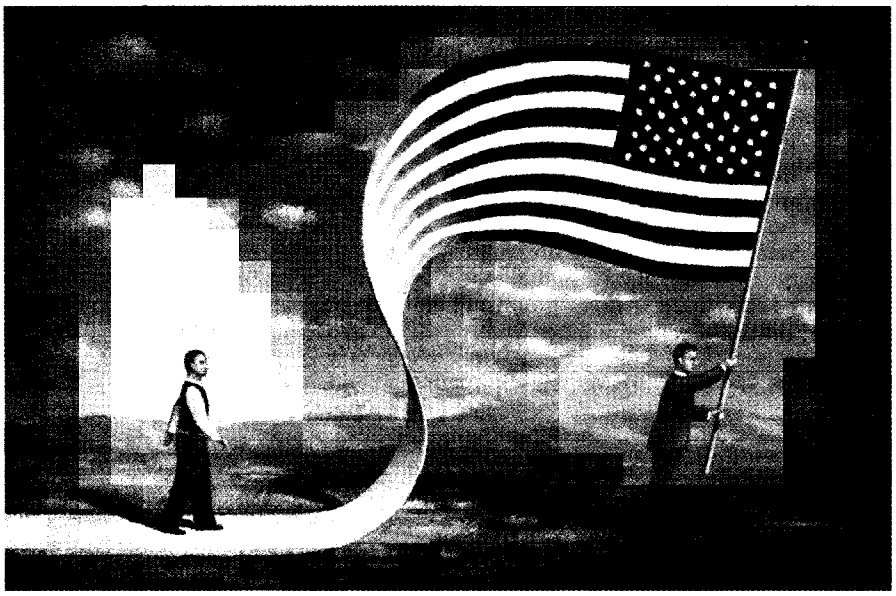


For the first time at least since 1989, but arguably since 1945, America has both the chance and the motivation to reshape the world, writes Bill Emmott, the editor of *The Economist*

WHEN Dean Acheson, Harry Truman's post-war secretary of state, wrote his autobiography, he chose a grandiloquent title to describe his dozen years in government. He had been "Present at the Creation", he said, by which he meant the building by America of a new world, out of the wartime rubble of the old—or, at any rate, of half a new world, the free half, while an ally turned enemy, the Soviet Union, built the other half. He was in turn quoting a 13th-century Spanish king, Alfonso X, who apparently said with equal immodesty: "Had I been present at the creation, I would have given some useful hints for the better ordering of the universe."

Today, two further lots of rubble are again inviting America to try to reshape the world: that left by the terrorist atrocities in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania on September 11th 2001, but also an older one not yet properly built upon, that left by the fall of the Berlin wall on November 9th 1989. Once more, we may be present at a time of creation, a time for useful hints, a time if not of order then of new responses to the world's habitual disorder.

That is, again, a rather grandiloquent way to describe things. This first decade of the 21st century is not the same as Acheson's period in the middle of the 20th, when Germany and Japan lay defeated and much of Europe and Asia devastated, and when the slate of international arrangements could readily be cleaned to make way for a new lot. America again leads the world in all dimensions of power—military, economic, cultural, scientific (see chart 1 overleaf)—by a margin out of all proportion to its population. But the world's slate is neither clean nor readily wiped, the uses and users of power have become more complex and varied, and America is itself led by an inexperienced, sometimes jejune president, bent on a narrower (if still daunting) task than was the also-inexperienced President Truman, that of fighting a "war on terrorism".

Moreover, the officials led by George Bush, seasoned though many of the senior ones are, have not yet inspired confidence that they know what broader set of policies they wish to follow, let alone how they might seek to reshape the world. They have defined their war as one of good against evil, of civilisation against terror, but have then butted their heads against the blood-stained brick wall that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They have spoken about a "regime change" in Iraq, but have done little about it. They have said they favour democracy, but then hesitated to condemn an attempted coup in April against Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez. They have said they favour free trade, but then slapped tariffs on steel imports and subsidies on farming. They have rubbished foreign aid, then embraced it; supported a bankruptcy procedure for coun- ▸▸

Sources and acknowledgments
Many people gave their time and advice generously to assist with the research for this survey, for which the author is very grateful. He would like in particular to acknowledge the kindness of Paul Kennedy and John Gaddis at the International Strategic Studies department of Yale University, and of Graham Allison at Harvard's Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs.
A select bibliography of articles and books used for this survey can be found on *The Economist*'s website.

tries in financial crisis, then opposed it.

Such behaviour may in time come to show that this administration is inept; or, just as likely, it may come to be irrelevant, for all administrations zig, zag and stumble from time to time. There is, to be sure, no blueprint currently on White House desks for changing the world. But it ought not to be forgotten that even before the terrorist attacks, President Bush had set in train a project—the development of a national missile-defence system—that promises over the next decade or more entirely to alter the way in which the world handles its nuclear arsenals and deters their use. It is possible to argue—and plenty do—over whether this system will ever work. But given America's money and technological record, it would be unwise to bet heavily against it. And on the way to making it work, the effort is likely to change relations between America and the other big nuclear powers, among many others.

Furthermore, two immediate things make change a likelier outcome than stasis. One is that the attacks on September 11th, and the fear of more in future on an even more devastating scale, have given the United States a powerful new motive for global activism, while persuading most other countries, whatever their snarls of criticism or resentment, not to stand in its way—at least for the time being. The second is that the actions implied by that motive are likely then to draw America into new acts and new types of engagement, whether it likes it or not. Even if a blueprint were to exist, it would soon be obselete.

With hindsight, both the tasks and the opportunities that lay before Presidents Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower in 1945-55 look fairly clear. But they didn't at the time. Acheson wrote that "only slowly did it dawn upon us" that the 19th-century world structure had gone, and that the struggle to replace it would henceforth be directed from Washington and Moscow. At first, even the need for post-war relief and rehabilitation was under-rated, having been seen "almost as capable of being met by semi-private charity". It took three years before America developed the Marshall plan to help revive Western Europe's economy, along with other efforts at overseas aid.

An expanding agenda

In today's very different context, a similar evolution is likely to take place. The challenge, as it was defined in the days and weeks following September 11th, is bound to change but also probably to grow. What began as a fight against the perpetrators of those attacks, a task that already looked large given their wide dispersal and insidious nature, has rightly been broadened further to include rogue states developing weapons of mass destruction. Thanks to happy victories in Afghanistan, it has come to take in the stabilising of that unhappy country to ensure it does not again play host to terrorists and—even more important—that it does not destabilise its nuclear-armed neighbour, Pakistan, itself repeatedly on the brink of war with India. And there is the associated task of discouraging violent militancy in other countries in Central Asia.

All that is before even mentioning the Arab world, the terrorists' main origin, in which Israel and Palestine provide their bloody complication, and in which the desired "regime change" in Iraq will require America to set to work on helping a new regime to emerge, an effort that may then put pressure on other Arab countries to alter their ways, too. An old taboo, on "nation-building" abroad, will have to be put aside. Then there is the decidedly unsmall business of handling the often prickly relationships with bigger powers such as Russia, China, India, Japan and the European allies, whose interests will be affected, for better and worse, by all this activism. As these tasks lead to others, and as unforeseen consequences occur, the magnitude of what is being attempted is likely slowly to dawn upon Acheson's successors.

Will they succeed? Just as after 1945, the honest answer is: only partially. But there are good grounds for optimism, founded in the nature and origins of the change that is occurring.

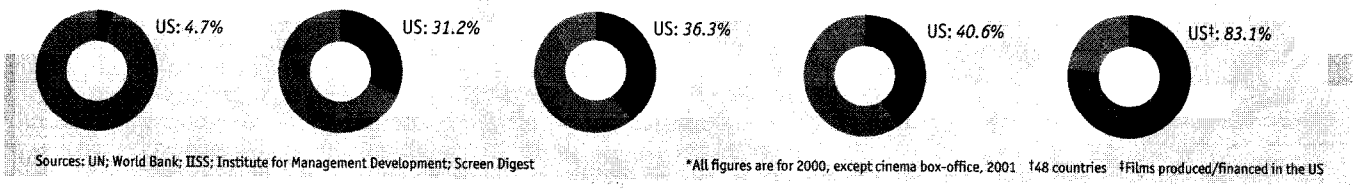
For the world did not change all at once on September 11th last year. Rather, the world had gradually been changing since at least 1989 thanks to the demise of communism. Mainly, the changes were for the better: the end to ideological superpower conflict; a vastly increased number of countries wishing to adopt liberal trading rules to join the market economy, and thus aligning their interests mainly with those of the West; technological innovation that made it easier for ideas to flow across borders; a big rise in the number of countries choosing and regulating their governments by means of democracy.

But, in three respects, it had also been changing for the worse: a number of deadbeat countries were falling into war and civil strife when cold-war restraints and props had been removed; technological change was threatening to put new destructive and organisational power in the hands of trouble-makers; and a new sort of trouble-maker—the messianic terrorist—was gathering recruits and strength. The dramatic manifestation of such terrorism on September 11th then brought about a sudden change in America itself. A sudden change in America means a sudden change in the world. A country that had gradually become loth to get involved in foreign entanglements, in the famous terms of George Washington's farewell address, gained a new determination and sense of purpose.

The reluctant sheriff no longer

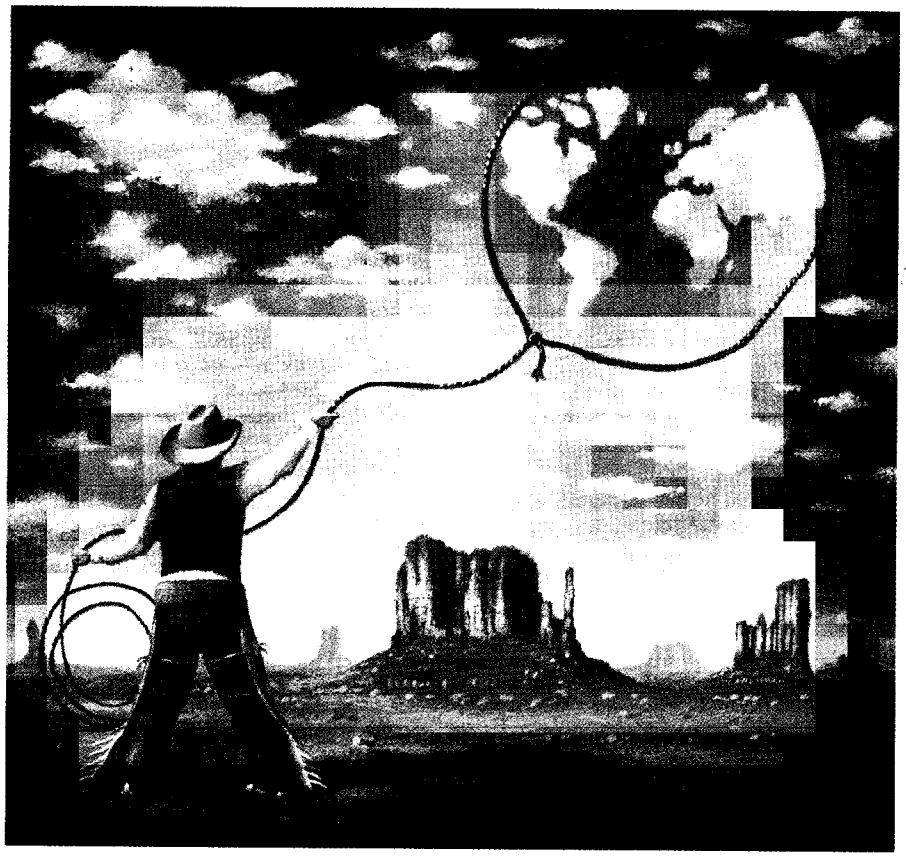
It was not that it had been idle during the 1990s, nor isolationist. It mobilised 500,000 troops for the Gulf war in 1991. At the end of the decade, it led—in effect, conducted—NATO's war with Serbia over Kosovo. During those ten years, American military interventions overseas were more numerous, if on a smaller scale, than during the whole four decades of the cold war. Its gung-ho economy, which reversed two

Measurements of power*



Sources: UN; World Bank; IISS; Institute for Management Development; Screen Digest

*All figures are for 2000, except cinema box-office, 2001 †48 countries ‡Films produced/financed in the US



decades of anguish and under-performance, boosted American self-confidence. In other areas too—trade rules, financial crises, human rights, war crimes, mediation—America played an active international role. But it did so hesitantly, against a backdrop of declining domestic interest in foreign affairs (a decline shared in Europe). It acted by improvisation, with no clear sense of purpose or coherent strategy, and a rather short attention span.

That is what has now changed. There may not yet be a coherent strategy, but there is certainly a clear sense of purpose. There is bipartisan unity on the main elements of foreign policy, which was absent even for the Gulf war. Opinion polls reveal considerable public backing for activism abroad. Few voices can be heard calling for America to withdraw or do less. As long as the sense of threat endures, attention is unlikely to wander. In 1997 Richard Haass, then a think-tanker at the Brookings Institution, wrote a book that called America "The Reluctant Sheriff". Now the director of policy planning at the State Department and considered moderate by the standards of the Bush administration, Mr Haass says that if he were writing the book now he would delete the word "reluctant".

Another word, once considered rather daring, is becoming commonplace in policy seminars and on talk-shows: empire. By last September Andrew Bacevich, a military man turned professor of international relations at Boston University, had completed the first draft of a book on America's world role, with a provisional title of "Indispensable Nation". Now it is to be called "American Empire" (and will be published this autumn by Harvard University Press). Though Mr Bacevich and others talk of American military commanders as "pro-consuls", no one has in mind colonies or an emperor. But there is a strong, sometimes hubristic, sense that America has the opportunities, obligations and threats associated in the past with empires: that it can set the rules that govern international relations, while at times operating outside them itself; but also that ultimately it alone can enforce those rules, a role which makes it the prime target of anyone who dislikes them.

How much is too much?

After a decade of urging America to do more abroad, plenty of outsiders now worry that this sole superpower may soon do too much. During the 1990s there was much enthusiasm for the idea that, contrary to the United Nations Charter of 1945, countries should intervene in others' affairs, preferably collectively through the UN, when they thought that some other country was doing terrible things to its people. Such beastly behaviour would mean, said solemn international commissions, that the normal rights of sovereignty could be waived. Now America is developing a similar argument for its own pre-emptive intervention in cases such as Iraq, where it suspects a dictator of planning to develop weapons of mass destruction. "Foul!", "Arrogant!", "Illegal!", comes back the international cry.

As well as seeking new rights, though, America is also refreshing some of its sense of obligation. The best example is the changing of mind on a topic once taken to epitomise foreign-policy fecklessness: development aid. In March at a United Nations summit in Monterrey, Mexico, President Bush startled delegates by announcing a 50% increase in America's $10 billion annual aid budget by 2006.

That is a big rise from a small base (it is less than half the European Union's combined aid budget, which at almost 0.4% of GDP by 2006 will remain proportionately three times more generous), but it came with other symbolism that made it feel more like a new beginning than a gesture: a rock star turned aid lobbyist, Bono, was by Mr Bush's side and also persuaded one of the hardest men of the right, Senator Jesse Helms, to back a special fund to help ease HIV/AIDS in Africa; and the general aid will be tied to conditions requiring good governmental behaviour in the recipient countries. If properly implemented, those conditions will represent a fresh form of interference in other people's business, but could also give development aid a new credibility.

Mr Bush does not believe that aid is needed because poverty causes terrorism. The September 11th terrorists were not poor, and most did not even come from poor countries. What the change of mind on aid implies, though, if it is indeed more than just window-dressing, is a strengthened belief that it is in America's long-term national interest to help more countries to take part in the process of international trade, investment and technology transfer that is popularly known as globalisation, and that to do so they need accountable, stable and legitimate governments. Mr Haass, in a speech to the Foreign Policy Association in New York in April, described this as an emerging doctrine of "integration".

That process, and all the social and economic changes it brings, may actually be part of what the terrorists were enraged by, so reinforcing it would be more a gesture of defiance than of accommodation. In the shorter term, the same instinct has led President Bush to call for "a new Marshall plan" for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, though he has so far been short on specifics about what should be done and who should pay. He has also, how-

ever, recently been decidedly anti-integrationist in his trade policies, applying those steel tariffs and signing into law a lavish new farm-subsidy bill. Openness on trade, which includes the leadership of the new worldwide round of liberalisation that was promised in Doha last November, is costlier for domestic lobbies than is aid. Those measures were lamentable, but not irreversible. Leadership on trade is still to be hoped for, and pressed for.

Put like that, it sounds obvious. By promoting integration and acting as sheriff, the United States of America could do a lot of good in the world in the next few years. But since it would be doing so not just by handing out bags of money but by exerting and even extending its power, pressing or forcing people to change their ways, the very idea makes a lot of people uncomfortable. Might there be a backlash against a bossy, unilateralist America?

Hail to the integrator-in-chief?

It is a truism, of course, that if America does bad things or makes bad mistakes, others will criticise it, shun it or even oppose it. It is best, however, to think about this emerging issue of American power and leadership in three ways:

- America's power relative to its rivals' and to other alternatives, including its allies.
- America's power relative to the challenges it faces around the world, and what it might achieve by using it.
- America's power relative to its own willingness to use it, or to keep bearing the costs of maintaining and using it.

This survey will explore those topics, and the questions they raise. Its answers—be warned—will be optimistic, and will generally be favourable to the United States. Certainly, American leadership will produce mistakes. But without American leadership, worse things would happen. And if any other country were in the lead, there would be much greater cause for worry. ■

The acceptability of American power

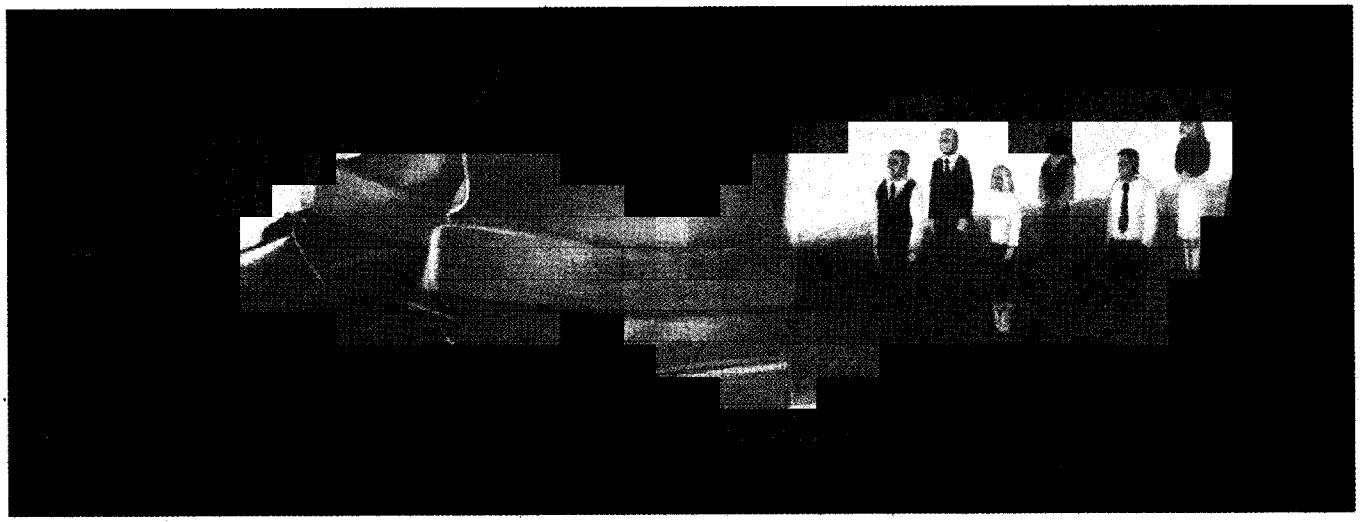
American primacy will continue to be welcomed by many, and tolerated by others, even if through gritted teeth

"YOU can always rely on America to do the right thing," quipped Winston Churchill, one of America's greatest 20th-century fans. "Once it has exhausted the alternatives." That quotation contains both the main components of what remains a typical European view of American foreign policy.

It contains admiration, founded on the experience that when America intervened in Europe's two great wars of the 20th century it did so on the right side, with the right values and with ultimate success. But it also contains a superiority complex, a view of Americans as bumblers or global ignoramuses. Given that Churchill presided over the handing to America in 1941-45 of what little world leadership Britain then retained, he could be forgiven for posing as teacher to America's pupil. Yet the syndrome has endured and even widened, half a century later.

Today's critics, and they are numerous even among its allies, tend to sneer that American activism is reviving only because the United States now itself feels under threat. It is, they say, a selfish, or at least self-centred, reaction to injury rather than a new internationalism; it is being led by an administration that rejoices in rejecting or abrogating international treaties, acting unilaterally rather than in multilateral concert with others; and they say that helpful activism will soon descend into adventurism. Moreover, in its use of military power, America seeks to make others—even its allies—take casualties rather than lose its own troops; and America's leaders are "simplistic" and "absolutist".

These criticisms are three-quarters true, but they are far from devastating. Indeed, they may even be taken as compliments. In a democracy as open and cacophonous as America's, and with a constitution expressly designed to thwart decisive action by any single branch of government, it is hard to persuade a majority to support costly and risky international activism. ▸▸



A dominance unparalleled 2

GDP (PPP) and defence spending, as % of "hegemon" country (hegemon=*100*)

GDP

	US	Britain	Russia	Japan	Germany	France	China
1870	108	*100*	90	na	46	75	na
1950	*100*	24	35	11	15	15	na
1985	*100*	17	39	38	21	18	46
1997	*100*	15	9	38	22	16	53
2000	*100*	15	13	35	21	15	52

Defence spending

	US	Britain	Russia	Japan	Germany	France	China
1872	68	*100*	120	na	65	113	na
1950	*100*	16	107	na	na	10	na
1985	*100*	10	109	5	8	8	10
1996	*100*	13	26	17	14	17	13
2000	*100*	11	20	15	10	12	14

Sources: 'The Stability of a Unipolar World' by William Wohlforth, *International Security*, 1999; *The Economist*

Self-centredness is not only natural but legally required. There has, admittedly, long been a deep seam of morality running through American policy, epitomised by Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" in 1918 and repeated in President Bush's "non-negotiable demands" on other nations in his state-of-the-union address in January this year. But idealism has rarely been enough to bring about timely or sustained action overseas; even Hitler's fascism required Pearl Harbour before Franklin Roosevelt dared enter the second world war overtly.

More will be said in a later section about treaties and their abrogation; there is right on both sides in different cases, and America's constitution queers the pitch by placing domestic law and Congress above all such international obligations. But on the Bush administration's side is the pragmatic argument that treaties are an intergovernmental means to an end, not an end in themselves; if, as with deals intended to counter the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, the treaties are being flouted (eg, by Iraq), someone has to provide the leadership to ensure that crucial treaties such as these are enforced.

The reluctance to take casualties reflects two things, one good, the other less so. The good cause is democracy itself, which in America makes politicians keen to preserve their citizens' lives and in Europe makes them want to spend as little as possible on defence. Even during the second world war, when nearly 300,000 American lives were lost, it can be argued that America won by using millions of Russian soldiers as its proxies against Hitler, rather as it recently used the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Still, given that America has 725 military installations outside its own territory, of which 17 are fully fledged bases, and that of its 1.4m active servicemen 250,000 are deployed overseas, it cannot really be accused of hiding in a continental shell.

The less good cause is the fear of failure that has, since Vietnam, led American generals and politicians to withdraw quickly from military trouble overseas, even when (as in Somalia in 1993) opinion polls support continued engagement. In the 1990s that tendency made the United States look weak and malleable despite its military prowess, and may well have encouraged Osama bin Laden in his attacks.

And simplistic, absolutist? That is how Chris Patten, the European Union's commissioner for external relations, described President Bush's "axis of evil" speech, just as legions of European critics lambasted Ronald Reagan's description of the Soviet Union as "an evil empire" in the early 1980s. It is the reverse of the criticism that America acts in its well-calculated self-interest, for both these presidents were using moral language to rally support and clarify their intentions, to foes as well as friends. Such clarity always comes at the price of simplicity, but the real question is whether it is backed by credibility. Before September 11th, it would not have been. The trouble with European sophistication is that it has been backed by virtually nothing, either before or since that date.

President Bush's moral tone has strength because it is now backed by popular democratic support in the face of fear, and by the credible threat of military force. It is not quite clear that Americans will "bear any burden, pay any price" for liberty and security, as President Kennedy urged in 1961, but it is clear that neither politicians nor generals will now withdraw at the first whiff of failure. If anything, the danger is the opposite: that, as in Vietnam, the need to succeed abroad could in some cases blind them to an emerging reality in which success is unattainable.

Whose side would you rather be on?

The gripes are global. Japanese and Chinese have queued up to buy books that advocate "saying no" to the bossy Americans. Russians have talked approvingly of partnerships with China, India or others to balance the sole superpower. Europeans—and not just the French—have said they must be united in order to provide a counterweight to the United States. Appalling numbers of European pundits, including British ones, alas, argued that although September 11th was dreadful, it was the inevitable result of American policies. And of course there is Iran, to which the United States is always the Great Satan.

The question, though, is what weight to give to such sniping. If you were to take it literally, you might worry, along with quite a few international-relations theorists, that today's American dominance will lead inexorably to global or local alliances against it. American power is not a solution, but a problem in itself. The world, on this view, demands some sort of balance and so, in time, one will form as others gang up against the arrogant hegemon. Or you might worry that a resented America will increasingly have to act alone, as it did in Vietnam, and that it will again be weakened or disheartened when it fails. And then the world will become more dangerous.

Of these, the second is much the bigger risk. To see why, look first at what other countries do rather than what their people say. There is no doubt that America's military lead is huge, and that its economic and technological lead is also large. Table 2, updated from a 1999 article in *International Security* by William Wohlforth of Georgetown University, shows how America's lead over others on pure economic and military measures is far larger than that held by Britain in 1870, and the lead on military measures is larger than America itself held in 1950.

The military gap, in particular, has been getting larger since 1989, and continues to do so. As chart 3 on the next page shows, until recently America was cutting its defence spending in real terms. Others, though, were also cutting theirs rapidly. Even China has hardly been narrowing ▸▸

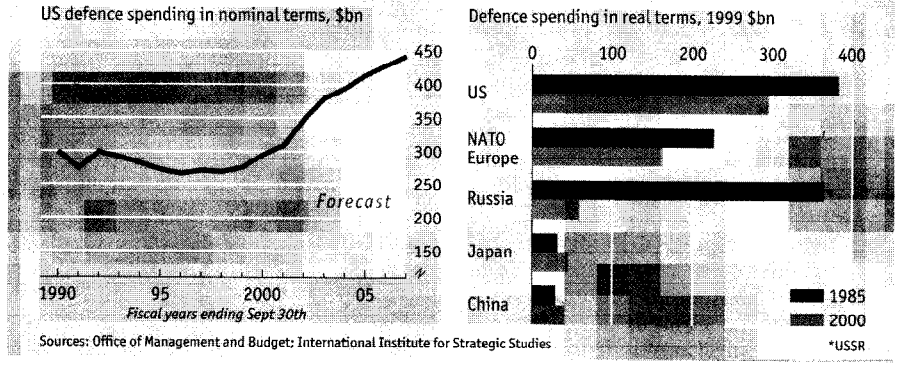
▸ the gap. And, in terms of effectiveness, the gaps are wider still thanks to America's technological lead and professional armed forces. America's European and Japanese allies have not been trying to narrow it; both have sought at times to retain some independence, by developing their own hardware or satellite systems, but not actually to compete with the superpower.

This is not what you would expect if the ganging-up theory held true. America's power should lead others to spend more, not less. Some countries are, indeed, spending more, but for fear of each other, not of America: India and Pakistan have raced each other on arms, and many countries in East Asia have been bolstering their defences. Most, though, have been—and still are—responding to America's military lead by shrugging their shoulders and cutting or freezing their budgets. To Europeans, and still more to Russians, it is all a trifle embarrassing; hence the European talk about a unified defence force alongside NATO, but not, so far, any extra money. *Tant pis*, they seem to say: America is not a threat, so why bother to counter it?

It is rather better, in fact, to be on America's side. And that is where, for all the gripes, more and more countries are finding themselves. Even the balance-of-power theorists recognise this tendency of "bandwagoning". In regions where there is a prospect that one country might come to dominate, the incentive to ally with America is even stronger: hence the enthusiasm in East Asia for American participation, rather than have China or Japan take the lead. When America was ignoring Afghanistan, Pakistan took the Taliban's side; as soon as America returned, Pakistan jumped into its camp. Despite concern over a future attack on Iraq, criticism of America still centres more often on its failures to act or participate than on the threat it, or its adventures, pose to others.

Ganging up is likelier, as well as already more common, in economic matters. America has the world's biggest economy and is the biggest trader, but it is matched by the similarly sized European Union, which speaks with one voice on trade policy, and by the second-biggest national economy, Japan. It cannot automatically get its way in the running of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, despite being their biggest shareholder; it has voluntarily (if grudgingly) pooled its sovereignty in the World Trade Organisation; and other countries have happily ignored its objections to international environmental deals or judicial arrangements and gone ahead to set them up themselves (even if the United States then remains outside them).

The military gap 3



Sources: Office of Management and Budget; International Institute for Strategic Studies

Such issues are instructive, however. Although ganging up on America is in principle likelier in trade and finance, and does occasionally happen, the prospects for it are limited by one big thing: that if you favour freer trade, or readier access to finance, America is generally the main proponent of both. And many more countries have, in the past dozen years, opted to join the American-led system of liberal trade and capital flows. Where America favours selfish protectionism, notably for agriculture, steel and textiles, the Europeans have favoured it too. A lack of American leadership on trade liberalisation might set back that cause considerably, but it would not bring about anti-American alliances.

Benign selfishness

For sure, the United States is, by its very nature, a selfish superpower. Its sheer power allows it to override objections from others and sometimes to be careless, since it knows—or thinks—it will be able to sort messes out later. Its immigrants went there to better themselves, to escape worse conditions elsewhere, to leave the world rather than lead it. Its constitution is designed to prevent not only strong government but also any interference from outside. When morality and idealism do start to take over the language of foreign policy, they are generally balanced by a more pragmatic search for the national interest, thanks to the discipline of democracy. Wilsonian morality has long tussled with the realpolitik of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Kissinger, and does so even in the words and deeds of George Bush.

Yet America's national interest is special, and not only to starry American eyes. It offers the closest match there is to a world interest. The desire for unimpeded trade, the rule of law, safety and security, the protection of property and the free movement of people and capital match world needs, not just American ones. Only when captured by the sectional interests of particular business, ethnic or religious groups do those American interests conflict with wider ones, as was recently shown by the steel tariffs, and has also been the case with some environmental laws, including the Kyoto deal. But as long as most American selfishness remains of the benign sort, it is unlikely to be opposed on a large scale, by coalitions of countries.

This does not, and never will, eliminate the niggles and the sniping from within America's growing band of allies, for pride is concerned as well as commercial interests, and the general match between American interests and the world's does conceal many specific frictions. But it limits the sniping's importance.

Even if they do not confront it, however, disgruntled allies can react to American actions in two other unhelpful ways. They can sit on their hands and leave America to get on with things, knowing that in a turbulent world there are limits to what even a superpower can achieve on its own. Alternatively, they can make life even harder for America by accepting its leadership but also surreptitiously selling trouble-makers the wherewithal to cause more trouble, such as missile technology or nuclear materials, or merely doing investment deals with the pariahs. That is what France, China and Russia have been doing, to different degrees, in recent years, in particular in Iraq. Yet America now has the chance to turn at least one of those countries into a far more co-operative ally and perhaps—just perhaps—to open a new chapter in worldwide efforts to contain the spread of weapons of mass destruction. ■

New friends, new opportunities

A grand new partnership with Russia could make the task of controlling weapons proliferation easier

"OUT of these troubled times", said the President Bush who was in office in 1990, "a new world order can emerge. A new era—freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure in the quest for peace." Those words, intended as a rallying call for the Gulf war, were poorly chosen for anything beyond that immediate cause. The world since then has been as disorderly as ever. Yet the elder Bush's much-derided phrases did contain elements of truth.

It has taken more than a decade for those elements to emerge into the sunlight, and even now there are plenty of shadows. The first President Bush was hoping that the former communist countries of Russia and its satellites would become democracies and market economies, allies rather than enemies, with most interests shared with the West rather than in opposition to it. The reflexive vetoing of each other's moves in the UN Security Council would cease, and perhaps be replaced by co-operation. With the two superpowers generally on the same side, a great strategic change would have taken place. But it didn't—until now. One unexpected consequence of September 11th has been that this at last seems to be happening.

Initially, support from Russia's President Vladimir Putin for America's war in Afghanistan could be put down to cynical opportunism: it provided cover for his own war against Muslim separatists in Chechnya. Although that doubtless played a part, his rapprochement with America has gone much further than that, culminating in the signing of a big nuclear-arms-reduction deal when today's President Bush visited Moscow at the end of May. And, although there are plenty of Russians who still see any gain to America as a loss to them, support for co-operation seems to have spread well beyond President Putin's own coterie.

America's renunciation last year of its 1972 anti-ballistic-missile (ABM) treaty with Russia caused barely a murmur in Moscow, despite countless warnings of dire consequences. The idea of enlarging NATO to take in countries on Russia's borders no longer raises the blood pressure of top military or foreign-policy types (some now even worry aloud that an enlarged NATO could become less effective, rather than more dangerous). Before last year, the presence of American troops in the former Soviet Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan and Kirgizstan would have been thought tantamount to a declaration of war; now, after a spot of grunting, they are seen as a boost to Russia's own security.

What has happened? Essentially, a process of leaning towards the West that was already under way with a few starts but many fits has been accelerated by co-operation during the war in Afghanistan and by the mutual fear not only of Islamic militants but also of states or terrorists using weapons of mass destruction. Yet it promises to have a longer-term momentum mainly for economic reasons: Russia's desire for trade and foreign investment, along with a hope that in the future, membership of the World Trade Organisation could force Russia's politicians and businessmen to accept proper commercial law and regulations. President Putin appears convinced that without economic integration with the West, Russia will never again be strong enough to defend its interests, let alone to carry any weight in the world. Russia is a sick country, with a shrinking population and a weak economy. It needs western medicine.

Although President Putin appears to be securely in power, he does not have his country on a leash. But his view seems to be prevailing, and America has a good chance of helping that process along. In these days of chasing terrorists, such great-power politics is sometimes considered unimportant. But that is short-sighted. A stronger, more confident relationship with Russia, developed beyond the good start that was made in Moscow a month ago, could offer some strategic advantages that will help with the terrorist problem too:

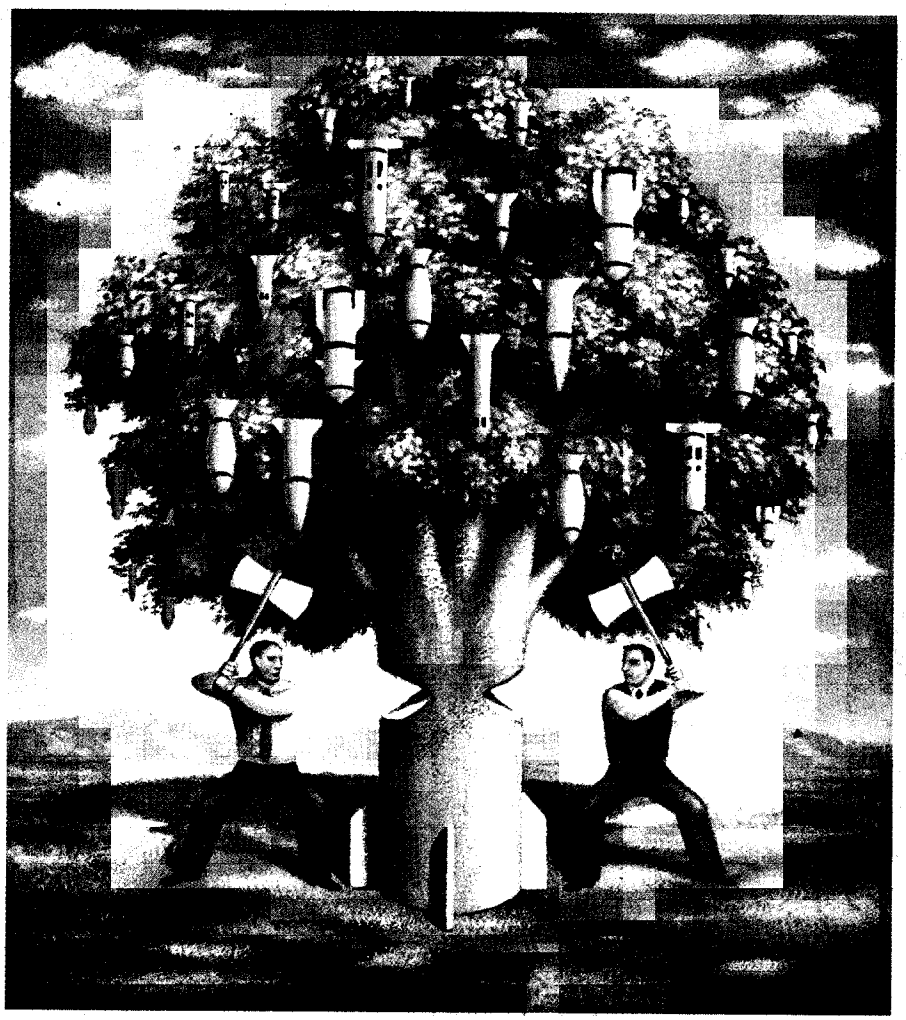
- It could make America's military access to Central Asia permanent rather than just a temporary expedient. Such a presence, if the governments of Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan and others agree, could put pressure on Iran—or, if Iran really worries about Russia and Pakistan, as Iranians say, reassure it—as well as easing the longer-term task of maintaining stability in the region.
- It could bring useful intelligence co-operation, particularly in Central Asia, Iraq and the rest of the Middle East, reinforcing gains made in Afghanistan.
- It could bring even more western investment into Russia's oil and gas industries, helping in a few years' time to reduce the power in the energy market of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, led by Saudi Arabia.
- It could ensure that Russia backs American efforts not only to force Saddam Hussein to allow UN weapons inspectors back into Iraq but also for any military action against him, as well as helping in subsequent efforts to rebuild the country. During much of the 1990s, Russia more or less represented Iraq at the United Nations and, along with France, blocked efforts to enforce the UN's Gulf-war ceasefire resolution requiring Saddam to disclose and destroy all his weapons programmes.
- It would make possible a sharp increase in co-operation between the world's two main holders of weapons of mass destruction in efforts to make such materials secure. There is already the Nunn-Lugar co-operative threat-reduction programme, named after the senators who sponsored it, which costs America more than $1 bil- ▸▸

Infamous ambitions 4

Countries with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons (W) and research programmes (R)

	Nuclear	Biological	Chemical
China	W	W	W
Israel	W	W	W
Russia	W	W	W
US	**W**		**W**
Britain	W		
France	W		
India	W	R	W
Pakistan	W	R	R
Iran	R	W	W
Iraq	R	W	W
North Korea	R	W	W
Egypt		W	W
Syria		R	W
Libya		R	R
Sudan		R	R

Source: "Deadly Arsenals" by Joseph Cirincione, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002



lion a year to help Russia tighten its nuclear security. But mutual mistrust has hampered its progress as well as limiting America's willingness to provide the funds. In January 2001, a commission led by Howard Baker, now America's ambassador to Japan, and Lloyd Cutler, a former White House counsel, recommended trebling the funds available to the Nunn-Lugar project.

- It could provide reassurance during work on America's national missile-defence (NMD) system that the end of the ABM treaty need not lead to a new arms race, at least not in Europe. Russia has shown interest in American offers to make NMD technology available to it. If rogue states' missiles are really going to pose a threat, Russia is a potential target. Iraq, Iran and North Korea are all close to its borders.
- It could dissuade China from seeking a Russian alliance to put pressure on the United States. Russia's real home is the West, even if it needs good relations with its Chinese neighbour, too. A Russian alliance with America could, though, help to encourage China to toe the line, in particular over issues such as weapons proliferation. It would also reassure the always panicky European allies that America is calming some big boats even as it is rocking others.

What, though, might a grand partnership look like? It is likelier to be an evolving alliance than something written suddenly on a piece of parchment, for Russia remains a semi-democracy with many pockets of truculence. Such an alliance could, though, be fashioned around two big projects: helping Russia join the World Trade Organisation; and combating the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

The urgency of this second project cannot be overestimated. The biggest worries about the security of nuclear, chemical and biological materials and know-how still surround Russian weapons hoards and programmes. An agreement could begin by finding ways to reassure each other about weapons security, extending the Nunn-Lugar scheme, and then seeking to apply that methodology of weapons security to offer joint help (ie, persuasion) to other nuclear states, such as Pakistan.

The opportunity is clear, even if the task of grasping it is far from easy. It is to place Russia firmly in the West by giving it a central role in sorting out new international arrangements to confront the most important security problem of this era—the danger posed by weapons of mass destruction in the hands of unpredictable dictators and terrorists.

The defining characteristic of that danger is that it is collective, rather than a special danger for particular countries. As the sole global power and the epitome of modernisation, the United States is always going to be a prime target. But it is not the only target. One of the difficulties in dealing with terrorists is that many of them do not have conventional territorial or practical objectives: simply expressing their strength by provoking fear and anarchy may be enough to boost their credibility or to make governments wobble, and that can be done in many places and ways. And rogue states too have global objectives, either to obtain pay-offs or to push back the hegemon, as well as local ones: survival, grabs of land and resources, and so on.

On the flip side of that difficulty, however, stands an opportunity: that of garnering a broad range of support for measures to deal both with international, especially messianic, terrorism and with the spread of the ghastliest weapons. Such support has existed in the past, giving rise to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and conventions against both biological and chemical weapons. But these treaties have been flouted by some signatories as well as ignored by outsiders, and enforcement has been lax, to say the least.

The end of the superpower conflict in 1989 was not sufficient to tighten things up. Indeed, by relaxing the security surrounding weapons stocks and releasing scientists into the jobs market, it made things harder. Other large powers, including China and Russia, saw chances either to alter local balances of power or just to make some money by selling materials and know-how. Now, though, there is a chance to stem the flow. All the big powers, including China, should feel vulnerable to the terrorist *jihadis* as well as to nuclear-armed rogues.

America is newly motivated to act as the world's enforcer-of-last-resort. But it also needs to make it plainer to others that the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons is not a subset of the war on terrorism but a huge danger in its own right. It could then seek to rally the big powers around its own *jihad*, declaring a *fatwa* against such weapons. That effort, as America has seen, needs to begin with Iraq, a country that has successfully evaded international commitments and controls. So far, though, America has done a terrible job of rallying support for military action to enforce those controls. ■

Saddam and his sort

Toppling Saddam Hussein would be to strike three birds with one stone

IN THE litany of anti-American criticism, one of the main charges is that the arrogant superpower ignores multilateral laws and procedures and goes its own unilateral way. A prime example is said to be its headstrong desire for a "regime change" in Iraq, a plan virtually all its allies except Britain currently oppose. It must just be a Bush family feud, say some, given the elder Bush's failure to complete the Gulf war in 1991. Or a macho disregard for others' views, led by Republican hawks. Yet Iraq is actually the best example there is of America following multilateral procedures, which an arrogant unilateralist called Saddam Hussein proceeded to flout. The question, then, is what you do when international deals and procedure are broken. Sit back and pretend it hasn't happened?

That, alas, has been the multilateralist approach. During the 1980s, Saddam sought to develop nuclear weapons (along with biological and chemical ones) despite having sworn not to do so by signing the NPT. He used chemical weapons during his long war against Iran, and then on his own people in Kurdish areas. In 1991, after Saddam had invaded Kuwait and then been defeated in the Gulf war, the United Nations voted in its Resolution 687, which required Iraq to disclose, destroy and abandon all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and associated research, as well as long-range missiles. It laid down a timetable for inspection and removal which was originally envisaged to last one year, during which economic sanctions were imposed as an enforcement mechanism. The sanctions permitted some exports of oil in return for imports of food and medicine.

Yet Iraq did everything it could to thwart and evade such disarmament, stringing the process out for seven years before eventually kicking the UN inspectors out altogether. Although during that time much progress was made in detecting and destroying weapons materials, Iraq was also shown to have lied at every stage—for example, about having ever produced a deadly nerve agent called VX, a denial it then replaced with a claim it had made only 200 litres, until the UN inspectors proved it had made at least 3,900 litres. So even what was discovered and admitted to cannot be considered definitive.

In the four years since the inspectors last visited Baghdad, four things have happened. First, Iraq rejected a much diluted new inspection regime, which offered a suspension of sanctions if it had been accepted. Second, Iraq succeeded in spreading the story that the sanctions have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children—which they have, but the sanctions would have been gone long ago if Saddam had co-operated with the UN. Third, in 2001 Russia blocked a proposal to target the sanctions more specifically at particular imports while allowing more exports of oil. Fourth, while the UN's failed policy continued to be "enforced" by sanctions and by two "no-fly" zones policed by American and British aircraft in northern and southern Iraq, Saddam has been free to resume his weapons programmes, funded by oil and other exports channelled through a thriving black market.

At every stage, the multilateral approach has failed, blocked by Iraq or by

permanent members of the UN Security Council, chiefly France and Russia. Those countries, China and others have been circumventing the sanctions. Recently Russia has changed its ways, to a degree, and has at last agreed to a modified (so-called "smart") sanctions regime. But what can be done now? All the options are terrible:

1) Continue with containment, ie, the status quo, allowing Iraq to blame America (to which the UN sanctions are ascribed) for children's deaths while rebuilding its weapons programme.

2) Demand that Iraq submit to a new inspections regime.

3) Give up altogether and wait till Saddam does something aggressive or barbaric that he can be punished for. This would make him a hero to those Arabs who like the thought of him seeing off the West.

4) Try to get a UN consensus to support an American-led invasion, intended to depose Saddam and to bring in a new regime willing to abide by Iraq's past international commitments.

5) Just invade, hoping that success will convince others that it was a good idea.

The apparent multilateral consensus is for either the second of these options or the fourth, though agreement is not universal even on those measures. And the question still arises: what do you do if either measure is (in effect) voted down or, in the case of a new inspections agreement, fails? Thus, the limit to a purely multilateral approach, under the ambit of the 1945 UN Charter, is exposed. Beyond economic sanctions, which have already failed or been scuppered by UN members, there is no enforcement mechanism except for American leadership. And that is what is likely to happen. There will be a multilateral process along the lines of option two. It will fail. And then America will invade.

Practical matters

It will be right to do so. Without an enforcement mechanism as a last resort, treaties and conventions designed to control the spread of the ghastliest weapons will ultimately collapse. There has to be a military sanction, albeit used extremely reluctantly. The trouble is that with these sorts of weapons, that sanction cannot wait un- ▸▸

til a nuclear or biological attack has taken place. It has to be applied pre-emptively.

But when? America has been saying at least since 1997 that it wants Saddam's regime to go. The case for acting soon is that it has already been left so long that America's credibility is damaged, and that the momentum gained by success in Afghanistan is there to be exploited. The case against is that with Israel and Palestine locked in violent conflict, no Arab country will support an invasion as they did the Gulf war in 1991. Saddam may be helping to stir up that conflict, and he may have links with the al-Qaeda terrorists, but little evidence of either has been disclosed.

In practice, the timing will be determined pragmatically. America will attack once the multilateral process has been under way for a while and has failed, and at a time that looks propitious. That choice is unlikely to be made while the Israeli-Palestinian war remains hot. Unless America has some clear evidence up its sleeve, it would be best advised to keep the case for invasion separate from the pursuit of al-Qaeda: the need to enforce the world's controls on weapons of mass destruction would make it strong even had September 11th never happened. The link to terrorism is a distraction.

Contrary to what some gung-ho armchair strategists say in America, an invasion would carry big risks. Those are not mainly of opposition by allies, though militarily the invasion would be a lot easier with logistical help from at least Kuwait and Turkey. The risks are that there could be large numbers of civilian Iraqi casualties if (probably when) Saddam uses them as shields, and that he might use whatever chemical, biological or even nuclear weapons he possesses. In either event the war could become very costly, including in American lives, and Saddam could seek to achieve a stalemate. Since failure looks unthinkable for the Bush administration, it would surely fight on. But the risk is then of Iraq becoming a new Vietnam, or Korea.

There are, though, big strategic gains to be had from a successful invasion, which are likely in the end to make the effort irresistible. First, there is the potential effect on would-be weapons proliferators all around the globe of a signal that international norms will ultimately be enforced. Both Iran and North Korea, the others named as in "the axis of evil", have already been showing signs of greater willingness to talk. Syria, Libya, Sudan, Egypt and others among the "at least 25" countries said by Bill Clinton's defence secretary, William Cohen, to possess or be trying to get hold of such weapons would also think at least twice.

Second, depending on what regime replaces Saddam's, a pacified Iraq could help tilt the balance inside its neighbour, Iran, between reformists favouring a friendlier relationship with the West and more democracy, and the anti-American, generally clerical, hardliners. During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, America supplied Iraq with some weapons in order to prevent Iran from dominating the region, a move that has yet to be forgotten, let alone forgiven. If Iraq, Russia and Pakistan all become more stable and less hostile, many justified Iranian worries will evaporate—after a period, to be sure, of fierce condemnation of American interference.

Third, a pacified, disarmed Iraq, under a new government, would provide the chance for a new start in America's dealings with the rest of the Arab world. It badly needs one. Thanks to unholy but necessary trade-offs made in past decades it is not only tarred with the brush of supplying Israel with money and arms but also with doing the same for a repressive regime in Egypt, as well as offering support to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Democracy exists nowhere, but economic failure and popular disenchantment exist almost everywhere.

This is the swamp in which fundamentalist or messianic terrorism has been able to breed, directed first at local regimes (especially Egypt's) but then, during the 1990s and on September 11th, at America. Somehow, the swamp has to be disinfected, even if it cannot be drained altogether. The first step in doing so will be the removal of Saddam Hussein. But that will be only the beginning of a long journey. ■

Building countries, feeling generous

Like it or not, America is going to have to get involved in nation-building

LEBANON, 1982. Somalia, 1992-93. Haiti, 1994-95. Bosnia, 1995-present. These are the prime exhibits in the case against getting involved with "nation-building" abroad. George Bush rubbished such involvement during his election campaign in 2000. Opponents of trying to help others rebuild and then run their countries deride it as turning foreign policy into social work. They say that countries do better without interference from outside, that it wastes money and enriches criminals, and that it turns American soldiers into targets for terrorists. All those criticisms are valid, though not in every instance. Yet circumstances dictate that President Bush's America is going to have to get involved in it. So it had better find ways to make it work.

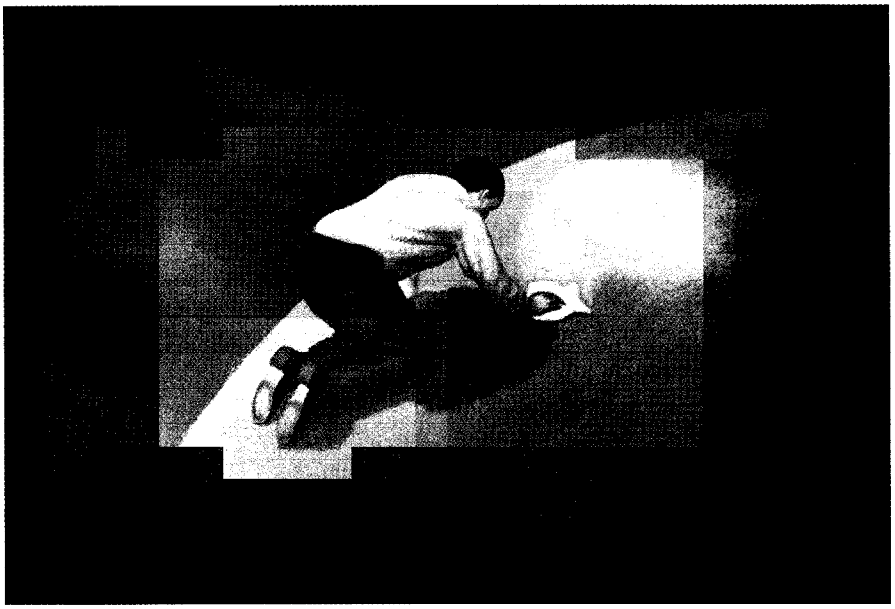
The United States is going to have to get involved with country-building in at least two places: Afghanistan and, assuming it invades successfully, Iraq. Critics will still argue that it would do better not to interfere, just as the French who helped America win independence from the British after 1776 did the new country a favour by keeping out of its way. But the stakes are too high for America now to do the same. A stable Afghanistan is vital to help keep Pakistan friendly and Iran on the straight and narrow, as well as steadying its other neighbours, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. A stable post-Saddam Iraq will also be vital.

The nature of America's involvement may well differ between the two. In Afghanistan, other countries are keen to do their bit, and can be left to do a lot of the work and provide much of the money—but they still need American leadership. The United States is being a bit sniffy about expanding the international peacekeeping force in Afghanistan, but is keen on training a new national army, and is heavily involved in fighting the remnants of al-Qaeda. There is also the complication of opium production, in which Afghanistan is a world leader. Given its efforts against drugs in Colombia, America is not going to be happy leaving the Afghans to return to growing and processing poppies. But if it takes that away, it will be obliged to help put some other income-earner in its place. That could require even more money than the $1.3 billion over four years that Amer- ▸▸

ica has pledged already.

In Iraq, blessed though that country is by resources, institutions and levels of education that Afghans can only dream of, the Americans cannot expect others to step in so readily. America may invade with only British and perhaps Turkish support. Russia may provide moral backing, and will be first in the queue of countries hoping to mop up oil contracts in the aftermath. But America may have to take on the initial policing and peacekeeping tasks virtually alone, as well as being the principal supervisor of the process of forming a new government. Some argue that it should allow or demand other Arabs to be the supervisor. It might. But to do so could invite even more fractiousness than Iraq's tribal nature already makes inevitable, as well as blunting the aim of using the new Iraq as an example for the old Arabs.

It will be a tricky business in both places. In Iraq, at least, the venture will have an imperial flavour, but America will want to avoid making the new country look like a colony. There will surely be no equivalent in Baghdad of General Douglas MacArthur in post-1945 Japan, for it would be too provocative for the other Arabs. Yet such is the American attachment to democracy that it is bound to try to require the new regime to adopt some sort of democratic constitution, along with a federal structure in order to give considerable autonomy to Iraq's Kurdish population. One trouble with Iraq is that it may be a country but it is not a nation, its borders and composition having been created by the League of Nations after 1918 out of part of the collapsing Ottoman empire.



In George Marshall's memory

Afghanistan and Iraq will be special cases, taken on because of their strategic importance. Will these, though, lead to more? Will George Bush become a global social worker? He has given some indications that he might: his unexpected announcement of a 50% increase in development aid at the UN aid summit in March, and a speech in April in which he likened the necessary efforts in Afghanistan to the Marshall plan with which America helped to revive Europe in 1948-51.

The critics of nation-building are right to be leery of it: outsiders take it on at their peril. The Marshall plan worked (although historians still debate how much difference it really made) because it injected funds into West European countries that already had the essential infrastructure of a functioning economy: government, the rule of law, banks, property rights. When the task is one of building that infrastructure from scratch, in countries where it has collapsed or long been non-existent, it is hard for anyone but locals to do it. They can be given training and advice, and a bit of money may help. As in Cambodia, a UN presence and money can make quite a difference. But it would be neither wise nor effective for America to try to take it on directly—except on a very selective basis.

There are three other ways, however, in which American involvement in this sort of thing could sensibly increase. One is already in use, in the Philippines, Pakistan and Yemen: joint operations with and training for armies and police forces trying to deal with terrorism. Although not often thought of in this way, this is classic country-building, albeit well targeted on strengthening a specific branch of government. Given that al-Qaeda is said to have cells in more than 60 countries, and that other terrorist groups can also be found in many places, this effort is likely to grow.

The second is through enhanced American participation in multilateral aid programmes. President Bush's March announcement concerned bilateral aid, but it implied close co-ordination with multilateral efforts. Here, as for Afghanistan, one parallel with the Marshall plan is valid: that such participation sends out a loud signal of political commitment. Links between aid and terrorism will be, and should be, played down. But at this time, when America is doing some vigorous boat-rocking in various parts of the world, signs of political commitment have value. And, even at $15 billion a year by 2006, this sign is not particularly costly. It amounts to less than 1% of the federal budget.

The aid is, as is becoming conventional, intended to be tied to conditions of "good governance" by the recipient countries, which also makes it an embryonic programme of country-building. America and others may have to make some efforts at helping countries to comply. Defining the conditions is difficult. But if it can be done, it could mark the beginning of a new era not only in the donation of aid but, more crucially, also in its effectiveness.

And Adam Smith's

The third way returns us to the notion of a foreign-policy doctrine of "integration", suggested by Richard Haass of the State Department and mentioned in this survey's opening article. Mr Haass's proposal is that America direct many of its policies towards helping countries join, or become more deeply involved with, the international flow of trade and finance.

There is plenty of room for doubt over whether others in the Bush administration share this view. Many will consider it typically mushy State Department thinking. Actually, though, the only mushy part of what is being discussed is direct country-building, but that is what America's military interventions are going to land it with anyway. The unmushy part—freer trade—would in fact answer the criticisms of country-building: it is a way of helping countries to help themselves, just as South

Korea did in the 1970s and 1980s, and China in the 1980s and 1990s. There is no doubt that it works: chart 5 shows the findings of a recent World Bank study comparing countries that have taken part in globalisation and those that haven't.

Integration requires countries to enable themselves to be sellers, through their own reforms. It also, though, requires others to be willing buyers. In other words, it needs trade liberalisation in the rich world, especially for the two sorts of product that are easiest for poor countries to make and sell: agricultural goods and textiles. Last November America put its broad shoulders behind the launch of a new round of trade negotiations at Doha, in Qatar, under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This round is intended to be of particular help to developing countries. The question now, and for the next few years, is whether those shoulders will also be deployed in making the negotiations a success.

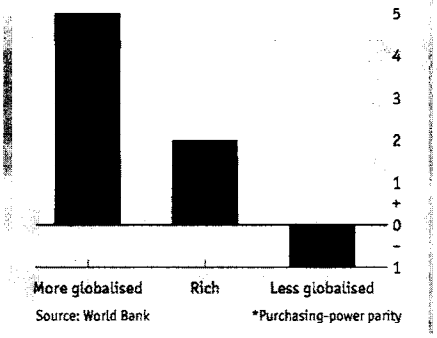
So far, the omens are poor. The administration succeeded in getting the House of Representatives to give it the "trade promotion" authority to negotiate, by the narrowest of margins, but the bill struggled in the Senate, and is now held up while the two houses haggle over amendments. President Bush's imposition of tariffs of up to 30% on steel imports offered a sop to protectionists who think trade endangers jobs in what is the world's biggest exporter. It also sparked off retaliatory threats from the European Union and others, pending a review of the legality of America's measures by the WTO. Meanwhile, an appalling new farm bill was passing through Congress which provides $170 billion in subsidies for American farmers over ten years, a rise of 80%.

The problem is not hard to detect. Mushy nation-building is cheap for Americans; trade liberalisation is costly for some domestic industrial and political interests. So far, President Bush has shown little stomach for fighting such lobbies. If his claimed love for free trade is to mean anything, though, he will have to start to find that stomach.

In the end, America's attitude to trade could prove to be the biggest test of whether this period is genuinely going to be one of broad-based "creation", as Acheson put it, or whether the new activism that is making change possible will in practice mainly be limited to military interventions and their direct consequences. The prospects for trade will also be one of the biggest tests of whether America is going to be content to establish and nurture an international system based on norms and laws—as was done in the WTO—or whether it might now prefer one based primarily on power. ■

The case for integration 5

GDP* per person, 1990s annual growth rates, %



Source: World Bank

*Purchasing-power parity

Our law, your law

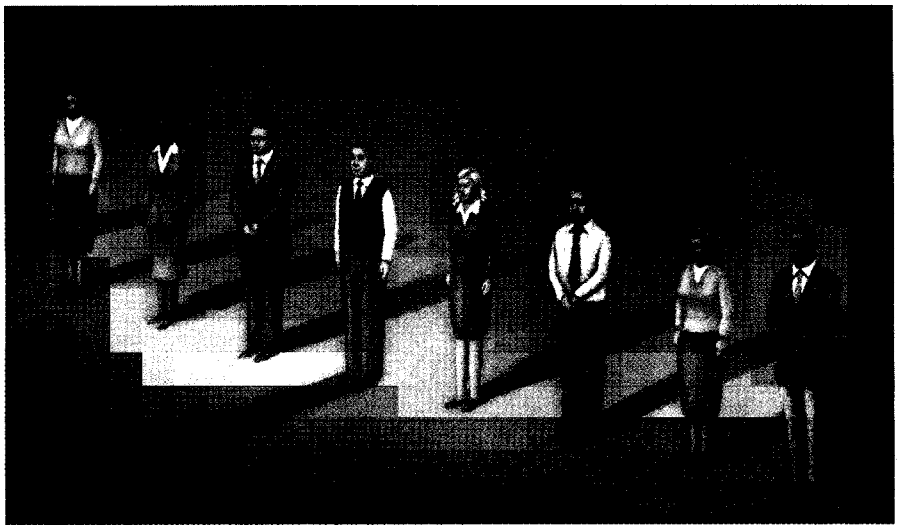
Treaties and global law are often a cheaper way to shape the world than military power

IT IS a country founded on the rule of law, as a better alternative to the rule of mad King George. In the past half century, it has been instrumental in spreading the principles of that law around the world, through the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, the UN Charter, dozens of conventions and treaties and, most recently, the ad hoc war-crimes tribunals set up in The Hague for Yugoslavia and Arusha for Rwanda. International commerce increasingly uses American law and even its courts to govern deals, and America's Justice Department (like the European Commission) applies its antitrust powers well beyond its own borders. Since the 1940s, moreover, America has helped to establish and then use big multilateral institutions with collectively set rules—the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and GATT's successor, the World Trade Organisation—to regulate trade and stabilise international finance.

This has long been thought of as a cost-effective way to make the world more to America's liking—to export American norms and to make the world easier for Americans (and everyone else) to trade in, travel in and fight wars in. That, indeed, is what critics of America have often argued in the past, most recently during anti-globalisation rallies in Seattle and Washington, DC, in 2000 and 2001: that these multilateral institutions are America's secret empire, through which its government and mega-corporations control the world. Like it or loathe it, the effort continues: even since September 11th the United States has led multilateral efforts to make rules against money-laundering binding on all countries, and has approved of the trial in The Hague of Slobodan Milosevic, once the Serbian dictator.

But this approach is under challenge—or at least in doubt. America under both Bill Clinton and George Bush has shunned a new international criminal court, the treaty for which has been ratified by 70 other countries, and the Bush administration has pulled out of efforts to agree on a verification protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention. It also rejected the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on climate change, though it was really just belatedly confirming a pre-emptive rejection by the Senate that was made in July 1997. Perhaps most alarming, however, has been its recent disregard for the Geneva conventions on prisoners of war in determining the legal status of people it has captured in Afghanistan and taken to Guantanamo Bay for questioning.

Why the challenge to the multilateral approach? There is an ideological answer and a practical one—which in turn explains why the ideological answer is now carrying such force. Start, then, with the practical one: terrorism and the menace of weapons of mass destruction. During the late 1980s and 1990s, the Bush (elder) and Clinton administrations tried to treat terrorism as a law-enforcement issue. Terrorists would be pursued and brought to justice, proving the awesome determination of ▸▸



American law. Thus, once two Libyans had been accused of planting the bomb that destroyed Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988, killing 270 people, the response was not military action against Libya but a trial under Scottish law in a court in the Netherlands. That approach was seen by many as slow, weak and not necessarily even just.

The scale of the outrage on September 11th made it inevitable that this would be seen as an act of war rather than mere criminality, and that the response would prove the awesome determination of the American armed forces. Moreover, even before September 11th, there was a strong view in the Bush administration that the treaties and conventions governing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction had failed. If you needed proof of that, look at Iraq. That view became even more prominent after al-Qaeda's attacks. These norms of good behaviour had to be enforced with the threat of military power and even, if necessary, the use of it. Treaties, after all, are not legal documents but political ones; they register commitments made by governments but threaten no sanctions if those commitments are broken or abrogated, apart from disapproval. On this view, the punishment has to be meted out by the American sheriff.

That, however, does not make treaties a waste of paper. The NPT probably has discouraged some countries from trying to develop nuclear weapons, by helping them gain confidence that their neighbours are not doing so, either. What anti-treaty Americans dislike most—and this is nothing new—is when a proposed treaty threatens to restrain America itself from doing something it might like to do. This is the issue with the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was rejected by the Senate in 1999. President Bush says he will not resubmit the bill for ratification. The concern is that the treaty will prevent America from testing new nuclear devices in future and therefore prevent it from keeping its arsenal up to date.

Yet for the country with already by far the world's largest and most advanced such arsenal, the restraint imposed by such a treaty is pretty theoretical; and if, in future, another country were found to be developing and testing more advanced weapons that threatened America's lead, it could always then withdraw from the pact. Instead, in order to retain its full autonomy, America has in effect undermined a treaty that promised to help restrain the spread of nuclear weapons—which it surely wants.

Still, that is the ideological answer: that treaties and other quasi-legal arrangements restrain the autonomy of the United States undesirably. This is buttressed by the argument that efforts to implement such treaties as if they were laws, through international courts and the like, are unconstitutional, illegal and politically dangerous, for the only legitimate laws and judicial systems are those rooted in and held accountable by national constitutions and parliaments.

Transnational structures, such as the international criminal court, have judges chosen by political horse-trading, so that their judgments are likely to be politically distorted, it is said. This may seem a bit rich from a country where the latest presidential election was decided by a Supreme Court whose members were selected by politicians and voted on political lines, yet that actually makes the point: law can never be wholly apolitical, so to be considered legitimate it must be rooted in a democratic system that citizens also consider legitimate.

A question of costs and benefits

War has given these arguments new force. But this is, in truth, a debate as old as the United States itself. Can the executive branch make international commitments that are binding on the legislative branch and on successors? The early answer, repeated many times since, was no: powers that the constitution assigns to Congress cannot be given away to others, except by constitutional amendment or by Congress's own say-so; and even when Congress ratifies a treaty, it can continually override its operations by, for example, refusing to provide any money. That principle was established in 1795 with the Jay treaty, concerning debts to Britain. And it lay behind the long wrangle over America's UN dues during the past decade.

The United States can be autonomous. But is it in its interests to be? As America's engagement with the rest of the world has increased during its more than two centuries of existence, especially in trade and finance but also in war, so the question has become steadily less simple to answer.

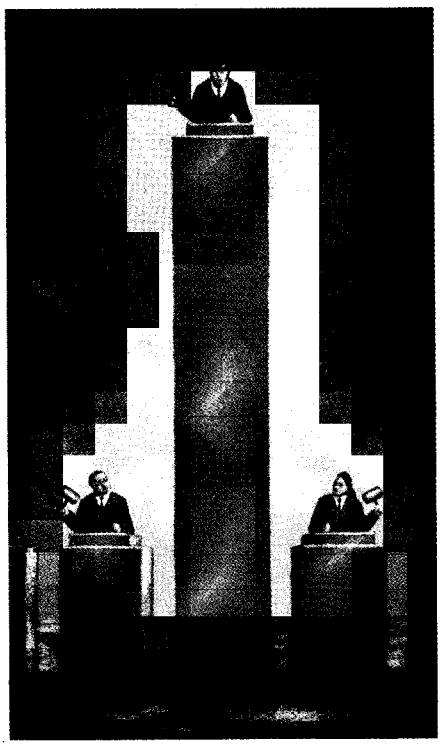
That explains why administrations have increasingly sought to use a constitutional loophole to make it easier to get foreign deals through Congress. A treaty requires a two-thirds vote in the Senate to ratify it, a higher hurdle than in most other countries, but something called an "executive agreement" needs only a majority vote in both houses of Congress. There is no distinction between the two in international law, but if Congress approves of the tactic, executive agreements are generally used as delegated powers of negotiation, especially in trade. Thus, between 1933 and 1945 the United States entered into 105 treaties and 123 executive agreements; between 1945 and 1952 it entered into 132 treaties but 1,324 executive agreements; and since then similar proportions have prevailed.

Trade offers one of the best examples of the complex balance between costs and benefits in this area. America does well out of freer trade with other countries, which is in turn facilitated by international agreements about barriers to trade. That is why it masterminded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1947. But Congress then rejected a more powerful version, the International Trade Organisation (ITO), which would have had the power to settle disputes and enforce agreed-upon rules. For half a century the GATT relied on voluntary settlement procedures, until America and others finally agreed to set up a body with the teeth originally envisaged for the ITO: the World Trade Organisation.

That body has, so far, been accepted by Congress, albeit with plenty of grumbling about the associated infringement of sovereignty. There is, however, continual friction between domestic trade laws and

the rules agreed by America under the WTO. This arises most notably in two areas: American anti-dumping laws, which have been used heavily in recent years to curb specific imports; and the notorious Section 201 of the 1974 Trade Act, under which temporary trade barriers can be imposed by the president when he thinks a rise in imports has hurt an American industry. The recent steel tariffs were imposed under Section 201. And the Senate has recently been trying to remove both Section 201 and anti-dumping laws from the bill to give the Bush administration "trade promotion authority".

Anti-dumping laws are on the agenda for the new Doha round of WTO trade talks, for which that negotiating authority is required. America is not the only country to be accused of abusing such tools, but America's trade representative, Robert Zoellick, agreed to include them only grudgingly because changes to the rules could provoke congressional opposition. Section 201 rulings are constantly being challenged in WTO appeals panels, and that is what is due to happen with the steel measures. So far in the steel case, the administration can claim it has acted entirely properly by imposing its measures and then leaving the WTO to produce a verdict. The question, though, will be what happens if the panel rules against America?



In no hurry 6

Human-rights treaties, executive and congressional action

	Negotiated by:	Submitted to Senate by:	Senate consent:
Genocide Convention	Truman	Truman	1986
Convention on the Political Rights of Women	Truman	Kennedy	1974
Supplemental Slavery Convention	Eisenhower	Kennedy	1967
ILO Convention on Forced Labour	Eisenhower	Kennedy	1991
Convention on Racial Discrimination	Johnson	Carter	1994
Covenant on Economic and Social Rights	Johnson	Carter	No
American Convention on Human Rights	Carter	Carter	No
Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women	Carter	Clinton	No
Torture Convention	Reagan	Reagan	1990
Convention on the Rights of the Child	Bush Sr	Clinton	No
International Criminal Court	Clinton	Not submitted	–

Sources: 'Why is US Human-Rights Policy so Unilateralist?' by Andrew Moravcsik, in "Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy", eds. Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman, 2001; *The Economist*

Whatever the rights and wrongs of that case—regular readers will know that *The Economist* frowns on the steel measures—the reaction to a negative verdict will be a crucial test of America's willingness to continue to make the trade-off that lies at the heart of its membership of the WTO and indeed of its advocacy of membership of it for others: the idea that losses of national autonomy in trade policy are worth enduring for the sake of the greater good of expanding worldwide trade.

As President Bush has said repeatedly that he favours free trade, the chances are that in the end he will want to continue making that trade-off, though he will face plenty of opposition in Congress. Recent administrations have had some success in using international deals to enforce or reinforce American norms in other areas, both in spreading laws against corporate bribery to other rich-country members of the OECD and in spreading money-laundering laws through the Financial Action Task Force associated with the OECD. In commercial affairs, the trade-offs often look favourable, but it is important that the administration continue to bang its drum for them.

Exceptionalism for the powerful

The same trade-offs arise when human rights, military autonomy and environmental rules are involved, but successive administrations and Congresses have been less willing to make them. On the face of it, it is a paradox: America has promoted worldwide standards for human rights, military behaviour and even environmental protection, and has reinforced them through foreign aid, economic sanctions, moral suasion and even military intervention; yet Congress has often balked at ratifying the treaties codifying such standards, taking years to do it, demanding reservations on the treaties that nullify much of their domestic effect, or even rejecting them altogether.

Table 6, from an essay by Andrew Moravcsik of Harvard, "Why is US Human-Rights Policy so Unilateralist?", in a collection on "Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy" (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), shows how this attitude has been consistent for at least 50 years. Even the convention against genocide took almost 40 years before it was ratified.

To that could be added the recent rejections of the Kyoto Protocol and of the CTBT, as well as the Bush administration's decision not to submit the Rome treaty for the international criminal court for ratification—three international negotiations in which the executive branch took a full part. Kyoto and the international court have, in effect, become the two most powerful witnesses deployed in the anti-Americans' case, especially in Europe: look, the critics are able to say, the United States is in favour of pollution and against justice.

Why the apparent hypocrisy, or at least stand-offishness? "Exceptionalism" is often offered as the answer—the American ideology, laid down in the early constitutional documents, of being both separate and different. But, as Mr Moravcsik argues, there is a simpler explanation: that America is a superpower and so can get away with it; combined with the fact that it is stably democratic, ideologically conservative and politically decentralised.

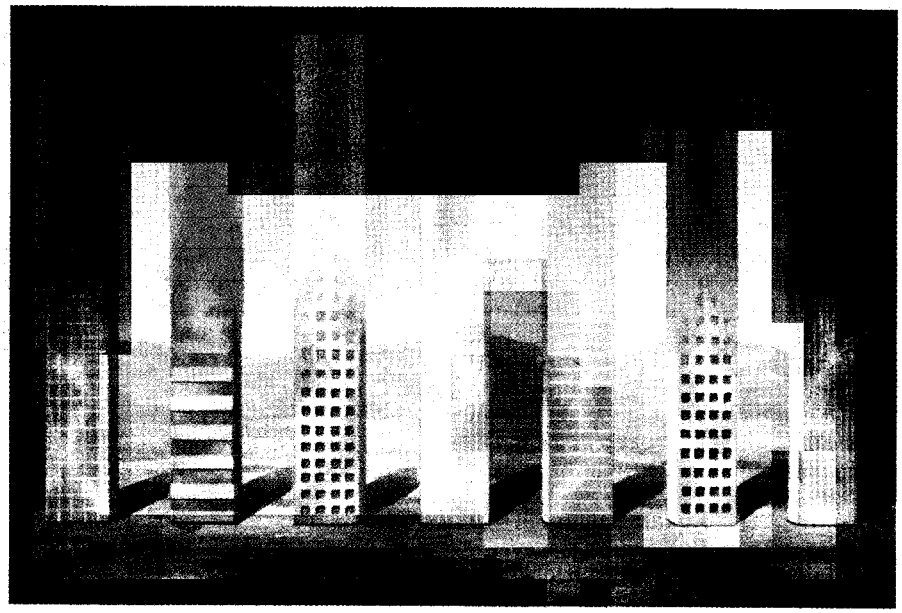
The superpower argument is not just ▸▸

about raw power, though that is part of it. In the case of the international court it is also about global exposure. The American armed forces are more active around the world than any other, and America feels the need to do more pragmatic, realpolitik deals with dodgy regimes than any other country. It is therefore understandably keen to avoid international conventions being used as a weapon against its own soldiers, or to name it as an accomplice to somebody else's sins. Pakistan could offer a current example.

The political arguments are, in essence, that a strong democracy resents having its hands tied by international agreements, for doing so limits the rights of domestic voters and institutions to set their own rules. America has, for instance, consistently fought to have socio-economic rights (such as trade unions and social welfare) excluded from international agreements, and differs from many countries (though not Japan) over the death penalty. Even if a Washington elite favoured concessions over such things, many American states would oppose them.

This fierce resistance is unlikely to change, especially under a Republican administration. The trade-off involved—acceptance of increased human-rights protections domestically and of potential punishments for American soldiers in international courts, in return for the spread of these legal norms to more countries and the punishment of more international criminals—does not appeal to a wide enough constituency. It is especially unlikely to at a time when the country is exerting its military power more strenuously, which makes it feel stronger and at the same time highlights the possible vulnerability of its soldiers to global courts.

It will be a pity, though, if at least a moderated form of this trade-off cannot eventually be made by America for the international criminal court. Military power is a necessary part of international policing. But it is also a costly way to do it, and international courts can usefully supplement such actions as well as reduce their cost. The rules governing the international criminal court contain plenty of safeguards against the court's misuse as an anti-American weapon, including a power for the UN Security Council to suspend misconceived cases. These courts depend on political agreements, and on assistance from governments, just as Slobodan Milosevic's war-crimes trial in The Hague depended both on American finance and on evidence collected by American officials and NATO forces.



Despite the obvious risks of military action, its costs and benefits can readily be measured in the short term. But the benefits of court actions and moral suasion cannot; they must be experienced, over the long term, as an experiment. Military action and the court are not direct alternatives, but they could supplement each other. However, America's shunning of the international criminal court, if it is maintained, will make the experiment much less effective and informative. It will be even harder to know whether it could have played a useful role in meeting American goals.

The United States has also inflicted an unnecessary injury on itself through the manner in which it rejected the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. In truth, however, the Bush administration, and the 95 senators (of both parties, therefore) who voted against Kyoto in 1997 before the protocol had even been fully drawn up, are right to criticise the climate-change deal.

By failing to include developing countries even as part of a future programme of emissions-reduction, the Kyoto deal was inadequate. Although the rich countries have caused the vast majority of the greenhouse-gas emissions in the past, the poorer countries are likely to contribute heftily to future emissions, if they are blessed by faster economic growth—and it is future emissions that are going to have to be curbed. Moreover, even for rich-country emissions Kyoto was inadequate, for although it set ambitious reduction targets it did not mandate terribly credible methods of achieving them.

The question then, however, is whether America was right to respond to such flaws simply by swiping Kyoto off the table, or whether it should have tried to improve upon it in a further bout of negotiations. Almost certainly, the Bush administration was correct in its claim that the protocol stood no chance of ratification by Congress. Yet it did not need to submit it to a vote—as, indeed, the Clinton administration had not, since 1997. It could have put forward proposals for a new and better protocol, and then challenged other countries to show why the existing protocol was superior.

That would have been a cleverer thing to do, assuming that the United States cared enough about diplomacy—but it doesn't, all that much. When it needs others to help get things done, it values diplomacy. Yet when others are wanting it to do things, the superpower can shrug its shoulders. In the case of global warming, that insouciance has harmed America's reputation.

Has it also harmed the country's interests, though? In so far as the Kyoto rejection has made others slightly less inclined to co-operate when it wants them to, yes; but that is not at present a big problem. On policies towards global warming, it has led the Bush administration to propose a purely national effort to reduce emissions that looks unlikely to be effective—which means the pain will be deferred, rather than avoided. ■

Imperial overstretch?

More a question of psychology than economics

PAUL KENNEDY, a British historian based at Yale, made himself notorious in 1988 by suggesting in his magisterial book, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers", that dominant powers had in the past fallen because of "imperial overstretch" and that the same might well happen to the United States. His judgment soon looked premature: the next year the Berlin wall's fall reduced the stretch with a twang, and the next decade America's economy became a world-beater. But that does not mean he will be wrong for ever.

Admittedly, the prospect still looks far-fetched. The burdens of America's world role are large and expanding, but not overwhelming. The resources produced by America's economy are vast, and the country recovered quickly from last year's brief and mild recession. Even so, the stretch is going to increase during the next few years. The real question is not whether America can afford its global burdens, it is whether it is going to want to afford them. Or, to put it another way, whether the effort required to afford them could have economic and political consequences.

On the face of it, the past offers some comfort. In the 1960s, at the height of the cold war and Vietnam, defence spending exceeded 9% of GDP in some years. In the 1980s, during Ronald Reagan's defence build-up, it reached 6%. In 2000 it was a mere 3% of what was by then a much larger GDP. And even the White House's proposal to increase spending next year by $48 billion to $379 billion, amid promises for more after that, would still leave it below 4% of probable GDP. That spending will exceed the military budgets of the next 14 biggest defence spenders combined, but will still be readily affordable.

America's military chiefs do not, though, think that next year's enlarged budget is anywhere near large enough. They argue that the increase has done no more than to repair damage done to reliability and readiness by previous trimming. The budget did little to transform the armed forces in ways that are often debated but hard to implement, such as turning army divisions into lighter, more mobile units; shifting the air force away from fighters and further towards bombers; and transferring resources from peaceful areas such as Europe towards hotter spots. The missile-defence scheme remains in its infancy, and is likely to cost more than current plans envisage. Following the war in Afghanistan, there will be pressure to spend even more on unmanned aircraft and precision-guided munitions. And the current strain on manpower is likely to persist for a long time, given the probable invasion of Iraq, continued fighting in Afghanistan, the desire to maintain bases in Central Asia, and subsequent peacekeeping and training roles in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

The services already have trouble recruiting enough men and women for what is a 1.4m-strong force, and there has been no rush to volunteer since September 11th. The cost of recruiting each extra soldier is said to average $15,000. More will be needed, and restoring conscription is for the moment a political non-starter. Nor can America afford to rely upon increased spending and capabilities among its allies, both because they have proved poor at spending and because even the NATO countries are so far behind technologically that it is getting ever harder to fight alongside them.

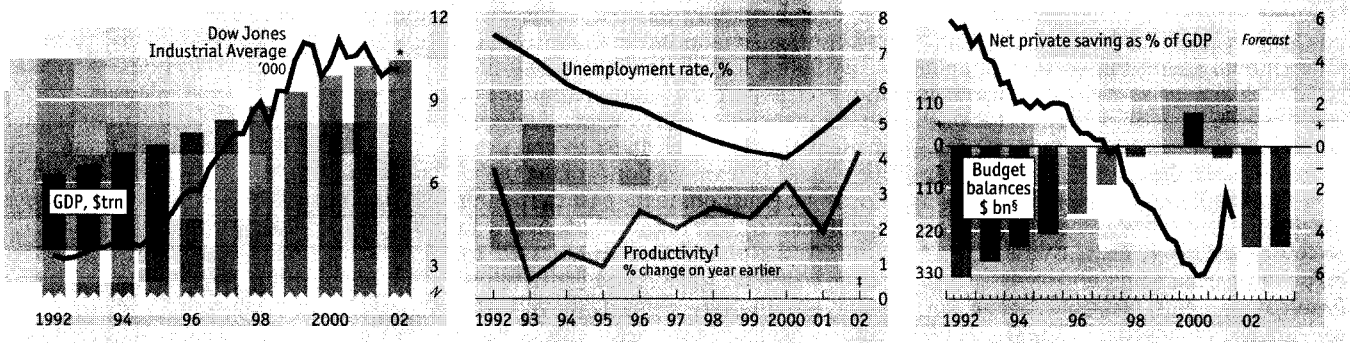
Reagan politics, Reagan economics

Defence spending is thus likely to rise quite sharply for several years, as will the much smaller budgets for the new Department of Homeland Security and overseas aid. At this point, however, the past begins to look a bit less comforting.

High levels of defence spending for Vietnam in the late 1960s and the Reagan build-up in the 1980s both contributed to the emergence of big federal budget deficits. In the first case, the deficit helped stoke inflation, with later reinforcement from an Arab oil embargo in 1973; in the second, the deficit meant that short-term interest rates had to be high to curb inflation and that long-term interest rates—the main determinant of corporate borrowing costs—stayed high for longer than they would otherwise have done.

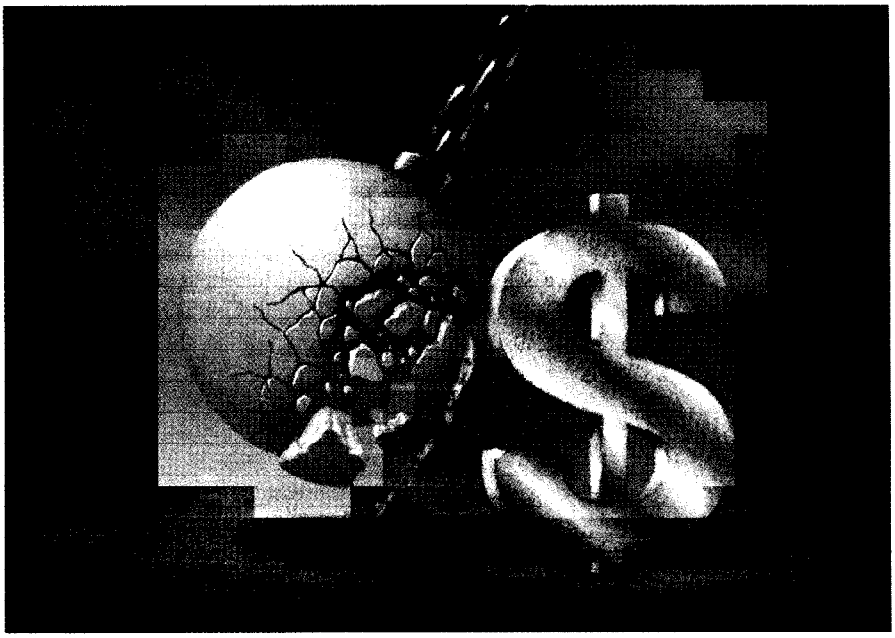
If defence spending does soar during this decade, the consequence is likely to be a moderated version of the Reagan era. As ▸▸

Reaganomics ahoy 7



*First quarter at annual rate †Output per hour, non-farm business ‡First quarter §On-budget, fiscal years ending Sept 30th

Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis; Thomson Datastream; Bureau of Labour Statistics; UBS Global Asset Management; Office of Management and Budget



then, the White House has committed itself to cut taxes at the same time as raising spending, so unless a lot of money can be cut from other programmes a large federal deficit is a likely outcome. Inflation may not jump as a result, because the Federal Reserve can be relied upon to raise interest rates if necessary. But that will make economic growth a bit slower, especially if extra federal borrowing again raises long-term rates. And there is a considerable risk that America's deficit on the current account of its balance of payments, already more than 4% of GDP, could help bring about a sharp fall in the dollar. That will be helpful for exporters, but could force interest rates to rise further.

Thus, the picture starts to look rather like the one that led Professor Kennedy to make his premature judgment: twin budget and current-account deficits raising the cost of money and making the dollar volatile, while politicians and voters start to wonder whether they have taken on too much. Three years after Professor Kennedy's book, America took on the Gulf war—but made its allies, especially Japan and Germany, pay the bills.

There is, of course, a crucial difference. The Gulf war in 1991 came after a decade in which the American economy had performed poorly, at least in comparison with its apparent new rival, Japan. A study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, culminating in a 1989 book called "Made in America", shocked readers by showing how badly American firms lagged in what were thought of as the key industries and technologies of the time. By contrast, the September 11th attacks came after a ten-year economic expansion, in which annual productivity growth had jumped, unemployment had plummeted and American firms seemed to be leading in all the key industries and technologies.

Far from deepening America's recession, as many economists immediately feared, the terrorist attacks turn out to have coincided with the beginnings of a recovery. Cuts in interest rates and in taxes, both before the attacks and after, seem to have helped maintain growth in consumer spending by ramping up house prices and making employees confident that even if they lost their jobs they would quickly find new ones. It would be premature, though, to declare that the first decade of the 21st century is therefore bound to be as buoyant for America's economy as was the final decade of the 20th.

Once again, America needs to be compared with Japan, but in a rather different way. Like Japan in the 1980s, America in the late 1990s was given an exaggerated sense of its economic strength by a huge speculative bubble in the country's stockmarkets. To alter the metaphor, it was rather like an Olympic athlete on steroids: basically impressive, but made to look even more so by the artificial stimulus of a financial-asset boom. Now the steroids have been withdrawn, America's economy remains impressive, but they are likely to leave side-effects.

Share prices crashed most spectacularly in the Nasdaq high-tech market in 2000-01, but the more conventional Dow Jones Industrial Average also slumped. In history, such crashes have always produced economic traumas of some kind, generally a combination of banking collapses, corporate bankruptcies, accounting scandals and waning confidence among consumers and investors. Bit by bit, these elements are emerging. Scandals at Enron, Global Crossing, WorldCom, Tyco and others are spreading disillusionment about the integrity and honesty of corporate managers; revelations about conflicts of interest and favouritism at investment banks are spreading a similar disillusionment about Wall Street.

The effects of such disillusionment on the wider economy are likely to be indirect: it will probably sap consumer confidence, and lead households to save more of their incomes for fear that their pension investments might be worth less than they once thought; companies will find it harder to raise new capital, and so will become more cautious about how much debt it is safe to carry and thus about capital investment.

In the immediate future, this probable economic bumpiness will be more important for domestic American politics than for international affairs. The determination to fight against al-Qaeda terrorists and, in due course, against Saddam Hussein, will surely not be affected. Economic weakness, especially if it is expressed in rising unemployment, will, however, make the Bush administration even keener to pander to domestic lobbies for trade protection, as it already has for steel and farms. Again, this will be a repeat of the Reagan era, when free-trade rhetoric was contradicted by measures to restrict imports from Japan.

The virtues of flexibility

Even so, there remain good reasons to feel confident about America's longer-term prospects; scholars should not be following Edward Gibbon by writing "The Decline and Fall of the American Empire" just yet. Where Japan suffered following its crash in 1990 from a rigid economy and political paralysis about what to do about it, America may suffer from some political paralysis but its economy is flexible enough to sort itself out, in time, cleaning up messes and reallocating resources rapidly. Gibbon, remember, was writing about the trials and tribulations of Rome's empire—but it was an empire that endured for hundreds of years.

Entrepreneurship looks strong and management capable—if overpaid. The greater intensity of competition in the American market than in either Western Europe or Japan continues to force firms to keep changing and innovating, and restrains their ability to raise prices. In information technology, American-based firms still lead the world. And venture capital has been flowing rapidly into the newer industries of fuel cells, genetics and medical technologies.

There are, though, two small clouds on

this otherwise sunny horizon that could be worth attending to. The first is that, despite the technical prowess of its universities, fewer Americans are taking undergraduate degrees in natural sciences and engineering than students in almost any other rich country. As chart 8 shows, only 6% of American 24-year-olds have first degrees in those subjects, a lower figure even than in Europe and far lower than in the stars on this measure, Finland and (surprisingly) Britain. America's universities lead the world in all the sciences, but many of their students, especially postgraduates, are foreign rather than American.

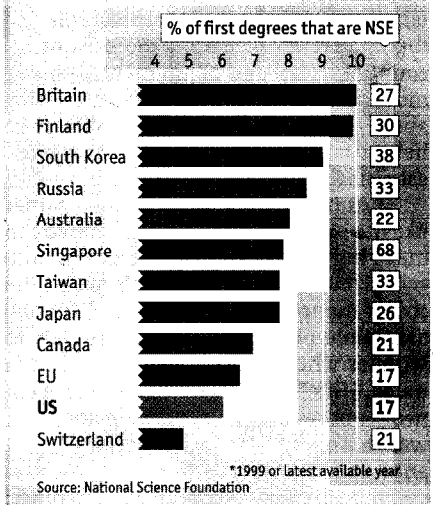
According to Paul Romer, an economics professor at Stanford University noted for his work on the links between technology and growth, the reason for this is likely to be that science courses are costly to provide, so colleges make them hard to pass. While English, history and economics faculties give high grades to 75% or more of their students, computer-science and chemistry faculties give A or B grades only to around 60%. The fault may be grade inflation in the arts courses, but the result is that fewer Americans want to take science.

Does that matter? It is a splendid thing that foreign students come to Stanford, MIT and elsewhere to study science; some of them stay and found companies or work in existing ones, while others return home and (it is hoped) speak warmly of their American experiences. Mr Romer does not want to discourage them. But he and others argue that the longer Americans continue to shun science courses, the more it will make America vulnerable—to a change in the wish of trained foreigners to work there, say, or just to a weakening knowledge of technical subjects in the workforce as a whole. He advocates subsidies to alter the incentives faced by both professors and American students.

The second small cloud looms over the new industry of biotechnology. It is the result of political opposition to the use of stem cells and other material from human fetuses in genetic research, which is a side-effect of the fierce battle that has long raged in American politics over abortion. What the ban on this and on all cloning means is that the pioneering research in this new and evolving field will take place elsewhere, in countries that do permit it. If the resulting industry turns out not to amount to much, this may not matter; for the time being, America remains the hottest place to do other sorts of medical research. But if it fulfils the dreams of its advocates, America will have sacrificed its domestic hopes in one of tomorrow's industries. ■

Reluctant scientists 8

% of 24-year-olds holding a natural science or engineering (NSE) degree, selected countries*



*1999 or latest available year

Source: National Science Foundation

New world ahead

What might future historians say about this new period of "creation"?

THE opportunities are great. The resources with which to grasp them are great, as is the determination. Yet the obstacles are great too. Will they, can they, be overcome? When assessing his period in government after 1945, Dean Acheson wrote, in "Present at the Creation", that:

> To the responsibilities and needs of the time the nation summoned an imaginative effort unique in history. Yet an account of the experience, despite its successes, inevitably leaves a sense of disappointment and frustration, for the achievements fell short of both hope and need. How often what seemed almost within grasp slipped away.

Once again, a considerable imaginative as well as physical effort is being summoned. Already, a radically warmer relationship with Russia can be counted as an important achievement, closing the chapter of history that began in Acheson's time. Again, though, there will be disappointments. Anyone who thinks that an imperial, exceptionally dominant America can now achieve anything it wants to need only glance in the direction of Israel and Palestine where, whatever its will (which has certainly wavered at times), America lacks the levers with which to force peace on the protagonists.

There is, moreover, a long battle ahead against four sets of opponents. One is the terrorist organisation which began this war last September. Despite America's triumphant dislodging of al-Qaeda's Taliban hosts in Afghanistan last autumn, and despite the disruption that that war and the associated surveillance and police operations have caused to the terrorists' infrastructure, it is likely that the true battle has only just begun. It is hard to discern exactly what are the objectives of Mr bin Laden and his fellows, but high on their list must stand a desire to grab control of one of the Islamic states themselves—preferably Saudi Arabia or Egypt, or, even better, nuclear-armed Pakistan. As long as that remains feasible, al-Qaeda's losses in Afghanistan in the past nine months will represent just a setback, not a defeat, rather as the failed 1905 putsch in Russia was for Lenin and the other revolutionaries.

Early 20th-century Russia does not offer an exact analogy to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan today, but like those countries it had a regime which failed to move with the times and failed to deal conclusively with a long tradition of terrorism and revolutionary ferment. Tsarist Russia looked secure after the shock of 1905, but then fell to the Bolsheviks in 1917. Rebels who have a cause can readily regroup and wait until a new opportunity presents itself. The Russian revolution shaped the 20th century, just as an al-Qaeda revolution in Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Pakistan could shape the 21st. It is not known whether Mr bin Laden is still alive, but it is also not known whether, in terms of this analogy, he represents the ultimate Lenin or Trotsky.

The second set of opponents is formed ▸▸

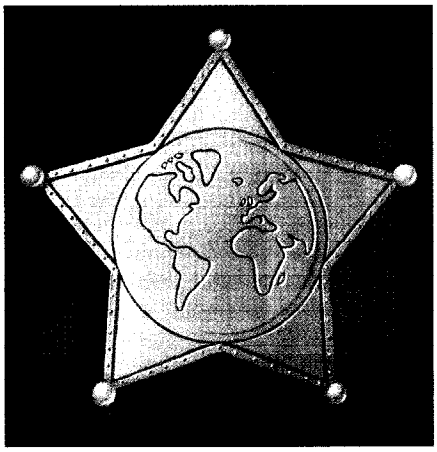
by countries which either have or are trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction. President Bush called three of them an "axis of evil" and drew down brickbats on his head for doing so. But although his phrase was over-simplified and implied a unity of behaviour and purpose between Iraq, Iran and North Korea that does not exist, he was nevertheless putting his finger on a real issue, one that is separate from the fight against terrorism. Neither nuclear nor biological nor chemical weapons can be uninvented, and it is doubtless unfair that they are already possessed by the traditional great powers and that those powers would like to prevent others from getting them. But such prevention is vital, for the thought of any of these weapons actually being used is so horrifying.

Iraq is the only country among the three that is likely to require a real fire-fight to persuade it (or, rather, Saddam Hussein) to give up its weapons programme. Iran should in time be persuadable once its own security fears (one of which is caused by Iraq) have been quelled, and once Russia and China have been persuaded to stop helping it edge in the nuclear direction. North Korea is likely to remain more a case of containment than of confrontation, in which a firm line must be drawn by America against new weapons research or testing, but in which a parallel process of engagement by South Korea will offer the main hope for longer-term peace.

There cannot be much doubt that, one way or another, Saddam Hussein will be toppled fairly soon by an American attack. There is, however, a lot of room for doubt about how smoothly the change will occur, and about what the consequences will be. At its simplest, to have punished the Iraqi dictator for breaking the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and thwarting UN inspections efforts will be a fine thing to have done, for the regional balance of power as well as for its deterrent effect. But the manner of his removal, and the popular response to it in Iraq and elsewhere, will also help determine how much of a disincentive his defeat will be to other would-be acquirers of weapons of mass destruction. If he proves able to use such weapons in order to raise the costs to America and any allies of removing him, then other countries and dictators could still think it worthwhile to develop them.

Also, however, an awkward pair of quandaries surround that war: one preceding it, the other following it. No prizes for guessing that the preceding quandary concerns Israel and Palestine, a conflict and set of dilemmas that has beset American foreign policy ever since Acheson's time, when Harry Truman decided to support the establishment of an Israeli state.

The immediate test for George Bush will be whether his diplomats can help stabilise that conflict; the historians' test will be whether he can then help bring about the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside something akin to the boundaries set up for Israel in the 1940s. In his favour are two things: a new determination on the part of the most important Arab country, Saudi Arabia, to press for a peaceful settlement and resolve the issue before it explodes in everyone's faces, including the Saudis'; and the strong feeling, which sustained peace talks during the 1990s, that there is no real alternative for either of



the protagonists except a two-state solution. Against him is, well, history and everything else.

That seemingly eternal struggle may not prevent an American invasion of Iraq, if some sort of new stalemate can be achieved in the meantime. A mere stalemate would, however, make harder the other quandary, which concerns what follows a change of the Iraqi regime. The creation of a new Iraq, and with it a new relationship between America and the Arab world, will probably represent the most important single step in this long battle.

Such a step will bring a danger that the American invasion could help encourage revolutions or new alienation in the most powerful countries of the region, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, rather as Iran's revolution of 1979 caused two decades of fundamentalism and anti-American hostility there. It will also bring a hope that, if there can be a more placid Middle East, perhaps achieved with Saudi help, as well as a renewed Iraq that is run by Arabs but is no clear threat to other Arabs, it could become possible to remake ordinary Arabs' view of America, and of their own regimes.

The things beyond the Israeli conflict that irritate some Arabs—American bases in Saudi Arabia, military aid to the Egyptian government—could then be honourably phased out. The sort of broad institutional structures that help bind countries together and ease mistrust could become feasible in that torrid region. Detractors call them talking shops, but forums for security or trade, say, have helped ease tensions in other places, such as Asia and Latin America. So far the scope for such things has been limited in the Arab world and the rest of North Africa either by mutual hatreds or by the dividing lines set by the Middle Eastern conflict.

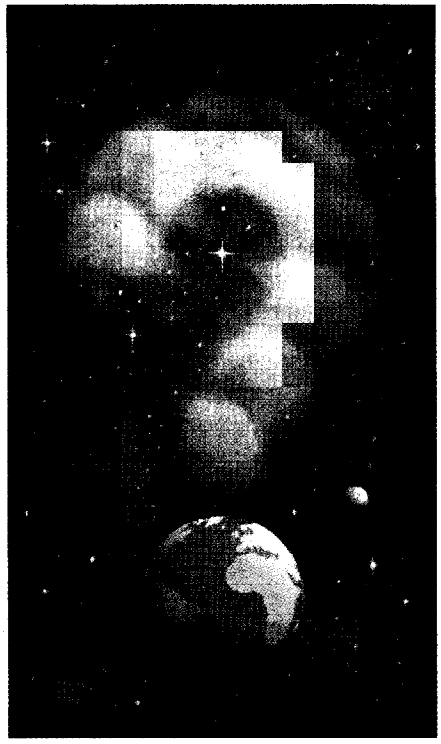
These first two sets of opponents are formidable enough. Even armed with his new friendship with Russia, President Bush is unlikely to repeat his father's mistake of talking dreamily of a "new world order". For the third set of opponents that America faces consists of the many disorderly events that are liable to jump up and bite any foreign-policy maker foolish enough to think that he has everything nicely planned and under control.

The ever-present danger of war between India and Pakistan is a prime example. If war were to break out it would not only bring the horrific risk of nuclear conflict but could also, by deposing Pakistan's currently pro-American government, open the way for a more fundamentalist regime or for an anarchy within which Mr bin Laden's terrorists would thrive.

One American eye will also have to be trained on China. Before September 11th, China was many people's top tip as America's biggest long-term challenge, for reasons which have not gone away: its possible political fragility, its resentment of America's military presence in the Asia-Pacific area, and, the nastiest headache of all, its designs on Taiwan. Meanwhile, another American eye needs to be on Indonesia, which is the world's largest Muslim country and is basically friendly to the West but which nevertheless has a still-fragile democracy and piles of separatist problems.

With opponents like all of those, who would want a fourth? Certainly not America, if it has any sense. Yet it does look like facing another sort of opposition: from its friends—at least if the mutterings of politicians and commentators in Europe are anything to go by.

After all, the world will have one domi- ▸▸



nant power, throwing its military weight around and being none too helpful in international negotiations over trade, the environment and justice. And there will be many resentful countries, several of which think they know better than the bumptious Americans, full of intellectuals keen to argue that the American way is wrong, or bound to end in tears. Put like that, this period of Achesonian creation can easily look likelier to be one of destruction, especially of the transatlantic alliance but also possibly of others.

Yankee go home—but take me with you

Yet that is the wrong way to put it. A break-up must be a theoretical possibility, but it is extremely unlikely in practice. The bold heading at the top of this paragraph puts the prevailing view of America rather better. It was the title of a monograph written a couple of years ago by an Indian politician, Jairam Ramesh, for the Asia Society in New York around the time of Bill Clinton's visit to India.

Beyond the specific circumstances of the subcontinent, Mr Ramesh's argument captured well a wider sentiment. India, like many countries in Europe, Africa and Latin America as well as Asia, often wants to rebuff or keep at bay American pressure or influence. Yet at the same time Indians dearly want to be part of America's world and of the modernity and prosperity that it both brings and represents. Outsiders are often ambivalent about America, and especially about particular American policies. But these days the ambivalence is mostly warm and sympathetic, not a hotbed of hostility.

Far from a world fracturing away from the powerful United States, the reality is that the world has been moving closer to it, and to its values and ways. The clamour of Indians, Chinese, Guatemalans and millions more to go to America to work or to be educated is not merely a mercenary reaction to its wealth. It is a reaction to the blend of opportunity, knowledge and freedom that America provides, and that nowhere else comes close to matching.

That clamour is also a reflection of the fact that most of the world's big, populous countries—India, China and Russia, most notably—have been trying for the past decade or more to open up their economies to match more closely the sort of economic freedoms that have made American capitalism, and American society, so successful. They are not trying to reproduce America exactly, and they never will. But they have been, and are still, moving towards its way of doing things rather than away from it.

This could change. But it would take an extraordinary shock to make that happen. America, in its current bout of military activism and diplomatic engagement overseas, is certainly capable of errors as well as hubris. Its policies on trade are especially short-sighted and could slow the future progress of the very globalisation that it has long favoured. But nothing it seems to be envisaging now looks capable of causing a shock of the sort necessary to turn the world's back upon it.

The only possible candidate could be the venture causing the most neuralgia in Europe, namely the invasion of Iraq. To do so, though, that attack would have to turn into an astonishing, Vietnam-like morass, probably with other Arab countries joining in the conflict. And when pondering that unlikely outcome, it is worth remembering that even the Vietnam war itself did not cause a wholesale turning against America. In those days, the cold war made solidarity with the United States more imperative, perhaps, but these days there are many more countries that are broadly sympathetic to America than there were in the 1960s.

They have new democracies or want them; they have capitalism, they want prosperity, they want freedoms. America is not the only country that epitomises such things, but it is for now their ultimate expression. It is also, for now, the only country willing and able to provide leadership to others in all its dimensions—technological, economic, financial, diplomatic as well as military.

In the end, what is historically unique about American leadership is not its power but its ultimately self-denying purpose: the more that America succeeds in spreading its interests and values—in politics, security or commerce—the less relative power it will command. That is what happened to Western Europe and Japan after 1945; they narrowed the gap, especially in economics, between themselves and America, thanks to its help and values. In future, the more trade, the more investment, the more security, the more democracy the world has, the likelier it will be that an open, democratic China (or even India) will one day match American power. That day is many decades away. But as long as America leads the world and sheds its reluctance to act as sheriff, it will edge closer. ■

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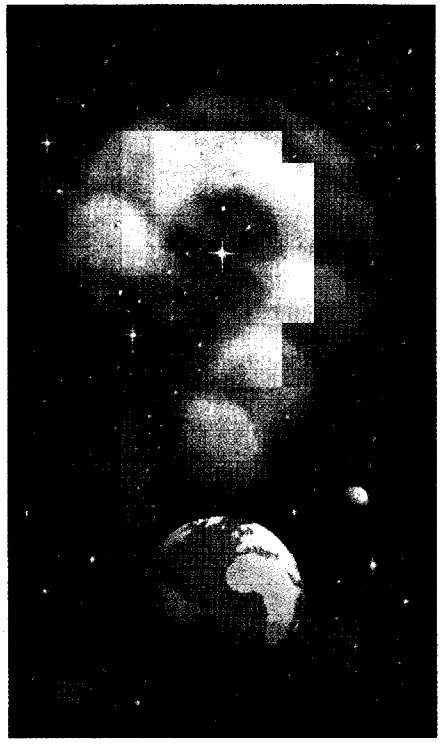

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